

Assassination Politics

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Assassination Politics

by Jim Bell

Part 1

I've been following the concepts of digital cash and encryption since I read the article in the August 1992 issue of Scientific American on "encrypted signatures." While I've only followed the Digitaliberty area for a few weeks, I can already see a number of points that do (and should!) strongly concern the average savvy individual:

1. How can we translate the freedom afforded by the Internet to ordinary life?
2. How can we keep the government from banning encryption, digital cash, and other systems that will improve our freedom?

A few months ago, I had a truly and quite literally "revolutionary" idea, and I jokingly called it "Assassination Politics": I speculated on the question of whether an organization could be set up to legally announce that it would be awarding a cash prize to somebody who correctly "predicted" the death of one of a list of violators of rights, usually either government employees, officeholders, or appointees. It could ask for anonymous contributions from the public, and individuals would be able to send those contributions using digital cash.

I also speculated that using modern methods of public-key encryption and anonymous "digital cash," it would be possible to make such awards in such a way so that nobody knows who is getting awarded the money, only that the award is being given. Even the organization itself would have no information that could help the authorities find the person responsible for the prediction, let alone the one who caused the death.

It was not my intention to provide such a "tough nut to crack" by arguing the general case, claiming that a person who hires a hit man is not guilty of murder under libertarian principles. Obviously, the problem with the general case is that the victim may be totally innocent under libertarian principles, which would make the killing a crime, leading to the question of whether the person offering the money was himself guilty.

On the contrary; my speculation assumed that the "victim" is a government employee, presumably one who is not merely taking a paycheck of stolen tax dollars, but also is guilty of extra violations of rights beyond this. (Government agents responsible for the Ruby Ridge incident and Waco come to mind.) In receiving such money and in his various acts, he violates the "Non-aggression Principle" (NAP) and thus, presumably, any acts against him are not the initiation of force under libertarian principles.

The organization set up to manage such a system could, presumably, make up a list of people who had seriously violated the NAP, but who would not see justice in our courts due to the fact that their actions were done at the behest of the government. Associated with each name would be a dollar figure, the total amount of money the organization has received as a contribution, which is the amount they would give for correctly "predicting" the person's death, presumably naming the exact date. "Guessers" would formulate their "guess" into a file, encrypt it with the organization's public key, then transmit it to the organization, possibly using methods as untraceable as putting a floppy disk in an envelope and tossing it into a mailbox, but more likely either a cascade of encrypted anonymous remailers, or possibly public-access Internet locations, such as terminals at a local library, etc.

In order to prevent such a system from becoming simply a random unpaid lottery, in which people can randomly guess a name and date (hoping that lightning would strike, as it occasionally does), it would be necessary to deter such random guessing by requiring the "guessers" to include with their "guess" encrypted and untraceable "digital cash," in an amount sufficiently high to make random guessing impractical.

For example, if the target was, say, 50 years old and had a life expectancy of 30 years, or about 10,000 days, the amount of money required to register a guess must be at least 1/10,000th of the amount of the award. In practice, the amount required should be far higher, perhaps as much as 1/1000 of the amount, since you can assume that anybody making a guess would feel sufficiently confident of that guess to risk 1/1000th of his potential reward.

The digital cash would be placed inside the outer "encryption envelope," and could be decrypted using the organization's public key. The prediction itself (including name and date) would be itself in another encryption envelope inside the first one, but it would be encrypted using a key that is only known to the predictor himself. In this way, the organization could decrypt the outer envelope and find the digital cash, but they would have no idea what is being predicted in the innermost envelope, either the name or the date.

If, later, the "prediction" came true, the predictor would presumably send yet another encrypted "envelope" to the organization, containing the decryption key for the previous "prediction" envelope, plus a public key (despite its name, to be used only once!) to be used for encryption of digital cash used as payment for the award. The organization would apply the decryption key to the prediction envelope, discover that it works, then notice that the prediction included was fulfilled on the date stated. The predictor would be, therefore, entitled to the award. Nevertheless, even then nobody would actually know WHO he is!

It doesn't even know if the predictor had anything to do with the outcome of the prediction. If it received these files in the mail, in physical envelopes, which had no return address, it would have burned the envelopes before it studied their contents. The result is that even the active cooperation of the organization could not possibly help anyone, including the police, to locate the predictor.

Also included within this "prediction-fulfilled" encryption envelope would be unsigned (not-yet-valid) "digital cash," which would then be blindly signed by the organization's bank and subsequently encrypted using the public key included. (The public key could also be publicized, to allow members of the public to securely send their comments and, possibly, further grateful remuneration to the predictor, securely.) The resulting encrypted file could be published openly on the Internet, and it could then be decrypted by only one entity: The person who had made that original, accurate prediction. The result is that the recipient would be absolutely untraceable.

The digital cash is then processed by the recipient by "unbinding" it, a principle which is explained in far greater detail by the article in the August 1992 issue of Scientific American. The resulting digital cash is absolutely untraceable to its source.

This overall system achieves a number of goals. First, it totally hides the identity of the predictor to the organization, which makes it unnecessary for any potential predictor to "trust" them to not reveal his name or location. Second, it allows the predictor to make his prediction without revealing the actual contents of that prediction until later, when he chooses to, assuring him that his "target" cannot possibly get early warning of his intent (and "failed" predictions need never be revealed). In fact, he needs never reveal his prediction unless he wants the award. Third, it allows the predictor to anonymously grant his

award to anyone else he chooses, since he may give this digital cash to anyone without fear that it will be traced.

For the organization, this system also provides a number of advantages .By hiding the identity of the predictor from even it, the organization cannot be forced to reveal it, in either civil or criminal court. This should also shield the organization from liability, since it will not know the contents of any "prediction" until after it comes true. (Even so, the organization would be deliberately kept "poor" so that it would be judgment-proof.) Since presumably most of the laws the organization might be accused of violating would require that the violator have specific or prior knowledge, keeping itself ignorant of as many facts as possible, for as long as possible, would presumably make it very difficult to prosecute.

Part 2

"At the Village Pizza shop, as they were sitting down to consume a pepperoni, Dorothy asked Jim, 'So what other inventions are you working on?' Jim replied, 'I've got a new idea, but it's really evolutionary. Literally REVOLUTIONARY.' 'Okay, Jim, which government are you planning to overthrow?,' she asked, playing along.

'All of them,' answered Jim."

Political Implications

Imagine for a moment that as ordinary citizens were watching the evening news, they see an act by a government employee or officeholder that they feel violates their rights, abuses the public's trust, or misuses the powers that they feel should be limited. A person whose actions are so abusive or improper that the citizenry shouldn't have to tolerate it.

What if they could go to their computers, type in the miscreant's name, and select a dollar amount: The amount they, themselves, would be willing to pay to anyone who "predicts" that officeholder's death. That donation would be sent, encrypted and anonymously, to a central registry organization, and be totaled, with the total amount available within seconds to any interested individual. If only 0.1% of the population, or one person in a thousand, was willing to pay \$1 to see some government slimeball dead, that would be, in effect, a \$250,000 bounty on his head.

Further, imagine that anyone considering collecting that bounty could do so with the mathematical certainty that he could not be identified, and could collect the reward without meeting, or even talking to, anybody who could later identify him. Perfect anonymity, perfect secrecy, and perfect security. And that, combined with the ease and security with which these contributions could be collected, would make being an abusive government employee an extremely risky proposition. Chances are good that nobody above the level of county commissioner would even risk staying in office.

Just how would this change politics in America? It would take far less time to answer, "What would remain the same?" No longer would we be electing people who will turn around and tax us to death, regulate us to death, or for that matter sent hired thugs to kill us when we oppose their wishes.

No military?

One of the attractive potential implications of such a system would be that we might not even need a military to protect the country. Any threatening or abusive foreign leader would be subject to the same contribution/assassination/reward system, and it would operate just as effectively over borders as it does domestically.

This country has learned, in numerous examples subsequent to many wars, that once the political disputes between leaders have ceased, we (ordinary citizens) are able to get along pretty well with the citizens of other countries. Classic examples are post-WWII Germany, Japan, and Italy, and post-Soviet Russia, the Eastern bloc, Albania, and many others.

Contrary examples are those in which the political dispute remains, such as North Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Cuba, Red China, and a few others. In all of these examples, the opposing leadership was NOT defeated, either in war or in an internal power struggle. Clearly, it is not the PEOPLE who maintain the dispute, but the leadership.

Consider how history might have changed if we'd been able to "bump off" Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Tojo, Kim Il Sung, Ho Chi Minh, Ayatollah Khomeini, Saddam Hussein, Moammar Khadafi, and various others, along with all of their replacements if necessary, all for a measly few million dollars, rather than the billions of dollars and millions of lives that subsequent wars cost.

But that raises an interesting question, with an even more interesting answer. "If all this is so easy, why hasn't this been done before?" I mean, wars are destructive, costly, and dangerous, so why hasn't some smart politician figured out that instead of fighting the entire country, we could just 'zero' the few bad guys on the top?

The answer is quite revealing, and strikingly "logical": If we can kill THEIR leaders, they can kill OUR leaders too. That would avoid the war, but the leadership on both sides would be dead, and guess who is making the decisions about what to do? That's right, the LEADERS!

And the leaders (both theirs and ours!) would rather see 30,000,000 ordinary people die in WWII than lose their own lives, if they can get away with it. Same in Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and numerous other disputes around the globe. You can see that as long as we continue to allow leaders, both "ours" and "theirs," to decide who should die, they will ALWAYS choose the ordinary people of each country.

One reason the leaders have been able to avoid this solution is simple: While it's comparatively easy to "get away with murder," it's a lot harder to reward the person who does it, and that person is definitely taking a serious risk. (Most murders are solved based on some prior relationship between the murder and victim, or observations of witnesses who know either the murderer or the victim.)

Historically, it has been essentially impossible to adequately motivate an assassin, ensuring his safety and anonymity as well, if only because it has been impossible to PAY him in a form that nobody can trace, and to ensure the silence of all potential witnesses. Even if a person was willing to die in the act, he would want to know that the people he chooses would get the reward, but if they themselves were identified they'd be targets of revenge.

All that's changed with the advent of public-key encryption and digital cash. Now, it should be possible to announce a standing offer to all comers that a large sum of digital cash will be sent to him in an untraceable fashion should he meet certain "conditions," conditions which don't even have to include proving (or, for that matter, even claiming) that he was somehow responsible for a death.

I believe that such a system has tremendous implications for the future of freedom. Libertarians in particular (and I'm a libertarian) should pay particular attention to the fact that this system "encourages" if not an anarchist outcome, at least a minarchist (minimal government) system, because no large governmental structure could survive in its current form.

In fact, I would argue that this system would solve a potential problem, occasionally postulated, with the adoption of libertarianism in one country, surrounded by non-libertarian states. It could have reasonably

been suspected that in a gradual shift to a libertarian political and economic system, remnants of a non-libertarian system such as a military would have to survive, to protect society against the threats represented by foreign states. While certainly plausible, it would have been hard for an average naive person to imagine how the country would maintain a \$250 billion military budget, based on voluntary contributions.

The easy answer, of course, is that military budgets of that size would simply not happen in a libertarian society. More problematic is the question of how a country would defend itself, if it had to raise its defenses by voluntary contribution. An equally simplistic answer is that this country could probably be defended just fine on a budget 1/2 to 1/3 of the current budget. True, but that misses the point.

The real answer is even simpler. Large armies are only necessary to fight the other large armies organized by the leadership of other, non-libertarian states, presumably against the will of their citizenry. Once the problem posed by _their_ leadership is solved (as well as ours; either by their own citizenry by similar anonymous contributions, or by ours), there will be no large armies to oppose.

Part 3

In the 1960's movie, "The Thomas Crown Affair," actor Steve McQueen plays a bored multi-millionaire who fights tedium by arranging well-planned high-yield bank robberies. He hires each of the robbers separately and anonymously, so that they can neither identify him nor each other. They arrive at the bank on schedule, separately but simultaneously, complete the robbery, then separate forever. He pays each robber out of his own funds, so that the money cannot be traced, and he keeps the proceeds of each robbery.

In my recent essay generally titled "Digitaliberty," or earlier "Assassination politics," I hypothesized that it should be possible to LEGALLY set up an organization which collects perfectly anonymous donations sent by members of the public, donations which instruct the organization to pay the amount to any person who correctly guesses the date of death of some named person, for example some un-favorite government employee or officeholder. The organization would total the amounts of the donations for each different named person, and publish that list (presumably on the Internet) on a daily or perhaps even an hourly basis, telling the public exactly how much a person would get for "predicting" the death of that particular target.

Moreover, that organization would accept perfectly anonymous, untraceable, encrypted "predictions" by various means, such as the Internet (probably through chains of encrypted anonymous remailers), U.S. mail, courier, or any number of other means. Those predictions would contain two parts: A small amount of untraceable "digital cash," inside the outer "digital envelope," to ensure that the "predictor" can't economically just randomly choose dates and names, and an inner encrypted data packet which is encrypted so that even the organization itself cannot decrypt it. That data packet would contain the name of the person whose death is predicted, and the date it is to happen.

This encrypted packet could also be published, still encrypted, on the Internet, so as to be able to prove to the world, later, that SOMEBODY made that prediction before it happened, and was willing to "put money on it" by including it outside the inner encrypted "envelope." The "predictor" would always lose the outer digital cash; he would only earn the reward if his (still-secret) prediction later became true. If, later on, that prediction came true, the "lucky" predictor would transmit the decrypt key to the organization, untraceably, which would apply it to the encrypted packet, and discover that it works, and read the prediction made hours, days, weeks, or even months earlier. Only then would the organization, or for that matter anyone else except the predictor, know the person or the date named.

Also included in that inner encrypted digital "envelope" would be a public key, generated by the predictor for only this particular purpose: It would not be his "normal" public key, obviously, because that public key would be traceable to him. Also present in this packet the predictor has earned. (This presentation could be done indirectly, by an intermediary, to prevent a bank from being able to refuse to deal with the organization.)

Those "digital cash" codes will then be encrypted using the public key included with the original prediction, and published in a number of locations, perhaps on the Internet in a number of areas, and available by FTP to anyone who's interested. (It is assumed that this data will somehow get to the original predictor. Since it will get to "everyone" on the Internet, it will presumably be impossible to know where the predictor is.) Note, however, that only the person who sent the prediction (or somebody he's given the secret key to in the interim) can decrypt that message, and in any case only he, the person who prepared the digital cash blanks, can fully "unbind" the digital cash to make it spendable, yet absolutely untraceable. (For a much more complete explanation of how so-called "digital cash" works, I refer you to the August 1992 issue of Scientific American.)

This process sounds intricate, but it (and even some more detail I haven't described above) is all necessary to:

1. Keep the donors, as well as the predictors, absolutely anonymous, not only to the public and each other, but also to the organization itself, either before or after the prediction comes true.
2. Ensure that neither the organization, nor the donors, nor the public, is aware of the contents of the "prediction" unless and until it later becomes true. (This ensures that none of the other participants can be "guilty" of knowing this, before it happens.)
3. Prove to the donors (including potential future predictors), the organization, and the public that indeed, somebody predicted a particular death on a particular date, before it actually happened.
4. Prove to the donors and the public (including potential future predictors) that the amount of money promised was actually paid to whoever made the prediction that later came true. This is important, obviously, because you don't want any potential predictor to doubt whether he'll get the money if he makes a successful prediction, and you don't want any potential donor to doubt that his money is actually going to go to a successful predictor.
5. Prevent the organization and the donors and the public from knowing, for sure, whether the predictor actually had anything to do with the death predicted. This is true even if (hypothetically) somebody is later caught and convicted of a murder, which was the subject of a successful "prediction": Even after identifying the murderer through other means, it will be impossible for anyone to know if the murderer and the predictor were the same person.
6. Allow the predictor, if he so chooses, to "gift" the reward (possibly quite anonymously) to any other person, one perhaps totally unaware of the source of the money, without anyone else knowing of this.

Even the named "target" (the "victim") is also assured of something: He his best "friend," could collect the reward, absolutely anonymously, should they "predict" his death correctly. At that point, he will have no friends.

This may represent the ultimate in compartmentalization of information: Nobody knows more than he needs to, to play his part in the whole arrangement. Nobody can turn anyone else in, or make a mistake that identifies the other participants. Yet everyone can verify that the "game" is played "fairly": The predictor gets his money, as the donors desire. Potential future predictors are satisfied (in a mathematically provable fashion) that all previous successful predictors were paid their full rewards, in a

manner that can't possibly be traced. The members of the public are assured that, if they choose to make a donation, it will be used as promised. This leads me to a bold assertion: I claim that, aside from the practical difficulty and perhaps, theoretical impossibility of identifying either the donors or the predictor, it is very likely that none of the participants, with the (understandable) hypothetical exception of a "predictor" who happens to know that he is also a murderer, could actually be considered "guilty" of any violation of black-letter law. Furthermore, none of the participants, including the central organization, is aware, either before or after the "prediction" comes true, that any other participant was actually in violation of any law, or for that matter would even know (except by watching the news) that any crime had actually been committed.

After all, the donors are merely offering gifts to a person who makes a successful prediction, not for any presumed responsibility in a killing, and the payment would occur even if no crime occurred. The organization is merely coordinating it all, but again isolating itself so that it cannot know from whom the money comes, or to whom the money eventually is given, or whether a crime was even committed. (Hypothetically, the "predictor" could actually be the "victim," who decides to kill himself and "predict" this, giving the proceeds of the reward to his chosen beneficiary, perhaps a relative or friend. Ironically, this might be the best revenge he can muster, "cheating the hangman," as it were.)

In fact, the organization could further shield itself by adopting a stated policy that no convicted (or, for that matter, even SUSPECTED) killers could receive the payment of a reward. However, since the recipient of the reward is by definition unidentified and untraceable even in theory, this would be a rather hollow assurance since it has no way to prevent such a payment from being made to someone responsible.

Part 4

In part 3, I claimed that an organization could quite legally operate, assisted by encryption, international data networking, and untraceable digital cash, in a way that would (indirectly) hasten the death of named people, for instance hated government employees and officeholders. I won't attempt to "prove" this, for reasons that I think will be obvious. First, even if such an operation were indeed "legal," that fact alone would not stop its opponents from wanting to shut it down. However, there is also another way of looking at it: If this system works as I expect it would, even its claimed "illegality" would be irrelevant, because it could operate over international borders and beyond the legal reach of any law-abiding government.

Perhaps the most telling fact, however, is that if this system was as effective as it appears it would be, no prosecutor would dare file charges against any participant, and no judge would hear the case, because no matter how long the existing list of "targets," there would always be room for one or two more. Any potential user of this system would recognize that an assault on this system represents a threat to its future availability, and would act accordingly by donating money to target anyone trying to shut it down.

Even so, I think I should address two charges that have been made, apparently quite simplistically, claiming that an implementation of this idea would violate the law. Specifically: "Conspiracy to commit murder" and "misprision of felony."

As I understand it, in order to have a "conspiracy" from a criminal standpoint, it is necessary to have at least two people agree to commit a crime, and have some overt act in furtherance of that crime.

Well, this charge already "strikes out" because in the plan I described, none of the participants agrees with ANYONE to commit a crime. None of the participants even informs anyone else that he will be committing a crime, whether before or after the fact. In fact, the only crime appears (hypothetically; this

assumes that a crime was actually committed) to be a murder committed by a single individual, a crime unknown to the other participants, with his identity similarly unknown.

Remember, the "prediction" originally sent in by the predictor was fully encrypted, so that the organization (or anyone else, for that matter) would be unable to figure out the identity of the person whose death was predicted, or the date on which it was predicted to occur. Thus, the organization is incapable of "agreeing" with such a thing, and likewise the donors as well. Only if the prediction later came true would the decrypt key arrive, and only then would the organization (and the public) be made aware of the contents. Even then, it's only a "prediction," so even then, nobody is actually aware of any crime that can be associated with the predictor.

"Misprision of Felony"

This crime, sort of a diluted form of "accessory before and/or after the fact," was claimed to qualify by "Tim of Angle," who subsequent to my answer to him on this subject has totally failed to support his initial claim. (A recent curiosity is that this crime is one that has been charged against Michael Fortier, the person who claims he helped OKC bombing suspect Tim McVeigh "case the joint" at the Federal building.)

I include it here, nevertheless, because his simplistic (and un-careful) reading of my idea led him to perhaps the "closest" law that one might allege that the participants would have broken. Tim claimed: No. That's called "misprision of felony" and makes you an accessory before the fact. Arguably, under the felony murder rule you could get TOA> capital punishment in a state that has such.

However, I did a little library research, checking Black's Law Dictionary. Here is the entry for this item: "Misprision of felony. The offense of concealing a felony committed by another, but without such previous concert with or subsequent assistance to the felon as would make the party concealing an accessory before or after the fact. United States v. Perlstein, C.C.A.N.J., 126 F.2d 789, 798. Elements of the crime are that the principal committed and completed the felony alleged, that the defendant had full knowledge of that fact, that the defendant failed to notify the authorities, and that defendant took an affirmative step to conceal the crime. U.S. v. Ciambone, C.A. Nev., 750 F.2d 1416, 1417. Whoever, having knowledge of the actual commission of a felony recognizable by a court of the United States, conceals and does not as soon as possible make known the same to some judge or other person in civil or military authority under the United States, is guilty of the federal crime of misprision of felony. 18 U.S.C.A 4." See also Obstructing Justice .in Black's Law Dictionary.

The only "element" of this crime which is arguably satisfied is the first: Some person other than the defendant for "misprision of felony") committed a crime. The second element fails miserably: "...that the defendant had full knowledge of that fact..." My previous commentary makes it clear that far from "full knowledge of that fact," other participants are carefully prevented from having ANY "knowledge of that fact." The third element, "that the defendant failed to notify the authorities..." is also essentially non-existent: No other participants have any information as to the identity of a predictor, or his location, or for that matter whether he has had any involvement in any sort of crime. In fact, it would be possible for each of the other participants to deliver (anonymously, presumably) copies of all correspondence they have sent, to the police or other agency, and that correspondence would not help the authorities even slightly to identify a criminal or even necessarily a crime.

In fact, normal operation of this organization would be to publicize "all" correspondence it receives, in order to provide feedback to the public to assure them that all participants are fulfilling their promises and receiving their rewards. This publication would presumably find its way to the police, or it could

even be mailed to them on a "fail[ing] to notify authorities." Nevertheless, none of this material could help any authorities with their investigations, to their dismay.

The fourth and last element of the crime of "misprision of felony", "...and that defendant took an affirmative step to conceal the crime," would totally fail. The organization would not "conceal" the crime. In fact, it will have no ability to do anything to the contrary, if for no other reason that it has no knowledge of the crime! And as described above, it would carefully avoid having access to any information that could help solve the crime, and thus it would escape any obligations along these lines.

Summary:

In hindsight, it is not surprising that such an organization could operate legally within the U.S., although at least initially not without political opposition. First, this is at least nominally supposed to be a "free country," which should mean that police and other authorities aren't able to punish behavior just because they don't like it.

Secondly, it is obvious that most laws today were originally written during an era in which laws assumed that "conspirators" at least knew each other, had met each other, could identify each other, or had (at least!) talked to each other. On the contrary, in my scenario none of the participants even know on what continent any of the others reside, let alone their country, city, or street. They don't know what they look like, sound like, or for that matter even "type like": None of their prose, save a few sparse "predictions," ever gets communicated to anyone else, so even text-comparison programs would fail to "target" anyone.

Equally surprising (to those who originally wrote the laws against "conspiracy") would be "Person A's" ability to satisfy himself that "Person B" deserves the award, without knowing that "Person B" is (or is not) actually responsible for a particular death.

Part 5

In the previous four notes on the subject of Digitaliberty, I've suggested that this concept (collecting anonymous donations to, in effect, "purchase" the death of an un-favorite government employee) would force a dramatic reduction of the size of government at all levels, as well as achieving what will probably be a "minarchist" (minimal government) state at a very rapid rate. Furthermore, I pointed out that I thought that this effect would not merely affect a single country or continent, but might in fact spread through all countries essentially simultaneously.

But in addition to such (apparently) grandiose claims, it occurs to me that there must be other changes to society that would simultaneously occur with the adoption of such a system. After all, a simplistic view of my idea might lead one to the conclusion that there would be almost no governmental structure left after society had been transformed. Since our current "criminal justice system" today is based totally on the concept of "big government," this would lead a naive person to wonder how concepts such as "justice," "fairness," "order," and for that matter protection of individual rights can be accomplished in such a society.

Indeed, one common theme I've seen in criticisms of my idea is the fear that this system would lead to "anarchy." The funny thing about this objection is that, technically, this could easily be true. But "anarchy" in real life may not resemble anything like the "anarchy" these people claim to fear, which leads me to respond with a quote whose origin I don't quite remember:

"Anarchy is not lack of order. Anarchy is lack of ORDERS."

People presumably will continue to live their lives in a calm, ordered manner. Or, at least as calm and ordered as they WANT to. It won't be "wild in the streets," and they won't bring cannibalism back as a national sport, or anything like that.

It occurs to me that probably one of the best ways to demonstrate that my idea, "assassination politics" (perhaps ineptly named, in view of the fact that its application is far greater than mere politics), would not result in "lack of order" is to show that most if not all of the DESIRABLE functions of the current so-called "criminal justice system" will be performed after its adoption. This is true even if they will be accomplished through wholly different methods and, conceivably, in entirely different ways than the current system does.

I should probably first point out that it is not my intention to re-write the book of minarchist theory. I would imagine that over the years, there has been much written about how individuals and societies would function absent a strong central government, and much of that writing is probably far more detailed and well thought out than anything I'll describe here.

One reason that ALMOST ANY "criminal justice system" would be better and more effective than the one we currently possess is that, contrary to the image that officialdom would try to push, anyone whose job depends on "crime" has a strong vested interest in maintaining a high level of crime, not eliminating it. After all, a terrorized society is one that is willing to hire many cops and jailers and judges and lawyers, and to pay them high salaries. A safe, secure society is not willing to put up with that. The "ideal" situation, from the limited and self-interested standpoint of the police and jailers, is one that maximizes the number of people in prison, yet leaves most of the really dangerous criminals out in the streets, in order to maintain justification for the system. That seems to be exactly the situation we have today, which is not surprising when you consider that the police have had an unusually high level of input into the "system" for many decades.

The first effect of my idea would be, I think, to generally eliminate prohibitions against acts which have no victims, or "victimless crimes." Classic examples are laws against drug sales and use, gambling, prostitution, pornography, etc. That's because the average (unpropagandized) individual will have very little concern or sympathy for punishing an act which does not have a clear victim. Without a large, central government to push the propaganda, the public will view these acts as certainly not "criminal," even if still regarded as generally undesirable by a substantial minority for a few years. Once you get rid of such laws, the price of currently illegal drugs would drop dramatically, probably by a factor of 100. Crime caused by the need to get money to pay for these drugs would drop drastically, even if you assume that drug usage increased due to the lowering of the price.

Despite this massive reduction in crime, perhaps as much as 90%, the average person is still going to want to know what "my system" would do about the residual, "real" crime rate. You know, murder, rape, robbery, burglary, and all that. Well, in the spirit of the idea, a simplistic interpretation would suggest that an individual could target the criminal who victimizes him, which would put an end to that criminal career.

Some might object, pointing out that the criminal is only identified in a minority of crimes. That objection is technically correct, but it's also a bit misleading. The truth is that the vast majority of "victim"-type crime is committed by a relatively tiny fraction of the population who are repeat criminals. It isn't necessary to identify. For example, even if the probability of a car thief getting caught, per theft, is only 5%, there is at least a 40% probability of getting caught after 10 thefts, and a 65% chance after 20 thefts. A smart car-theft victim would be happy to donate money targeting ANY discovered car-thief, not necessarily just the one who victimized him.

The average car-owner would be wise to offer such donations occasionally, as "insurance" against the possibility of his being victimized someday: An average donation of 1 cent per day per car would constitute \$10,000 per day for a typical city of 1 million cars. Assuming that amount is far more than enough to get a typical car thief's "friends" to "off" him, there is simply no way that a substantial car-theft subculture could possibly be maintained.

Another alternative is that insurance companies would probably get into the act: Since they are going to be the financial victims of thefts of their insured's property, it is reasonable to suppose that they would be particularly inclined to deter such theft. It is conceivable that current-day insurance companies would transmogrify themselves into investigation/deterrence agencies, while maintaining their insurance role, in view of the fact that they have the most to lose. This is particularly true because if "assassination politics" (as applied to criminals and crime) comes about, they could then actually DO SOMETHING about the problem, rather than merely reporting on the statistics to their customers and stockholders.

Such companies would also have a strong motivation to provide a workable system of rewards for solving crimes and identifying criminals, rewards that (naturally enough!) can be given out totally anonymously.

While I would like to talk about the other advantage of this new kind of justice, the fact that politicians and other government employees would no longer have de-facto immunity in most cases, the reality is that since we would no longer HAVE "politicians and other government employees," to mention that advantage would be redundant.

The principle is valid, however: In today's system, you can have people known to be guilty of crimes, but not prosecuted because they are part of "the system." Classic examples would be heroes of the right (Oliver North) and heroes of the left (Jim Wright) who either escape prosecution or conviction for "political" or "bureaucratic" reasons. With "assassination politics" that would simply never happen.

Part 6

A frequent initial belief among people who have recently heard of my "assassination politics" idea is the fear that this system will somehow be "out of control": It would end up causing the death of ordinary, "undeserving" people.

This system, however, will not be without its own kind of "control." Not a centralized control, decidable by a single individual, but a decentralized system in which everyone gets an implicit "vote." A good analogy might be to consider a society in which everyone's house thermostat is controlled to operate at a temperature which is set for the entire country. Each person's control input is taken as a "vote," whether to get hotter, colder, or to stay the same temperature. The central control computer adjusts the national setpoint temperature in order to equalize the number of people who want the temperature colder and hotter. Each house is at the same, nationally set temperature, however. Clearly, no one individual is in control of the setting. Nevertheless, I think it would be generally agreed that this system would never produce a REALLY "off the wall" temperature setting, simply because so many people's inputs are used to determine the output. Sure, if a group of 10,000 kids decided (assisted by the Internet) together to screw with the system, and they all set their houses' thermostat inputs to "hotter," they could SLIGHTLY increase the overall setting, but since there are probably about 100 million separate dwellings in the U.S., their fiddlings will be drowned out by the vast majority of the population's desires. Is this system "out of control"? True, it is out of the "control" of any single individual, but nevertheless it is well within the control of the population as a whole.

It turns out that "assassination politics" actually has a rather similar control mechanism to the one I've described above. First, I've pointed out that if I were to operate a centralized system such as this, I'd only accept donations naming people who are in violation of the "Non-Initiation Of Force Principle" (NIOFP), well known to libertarians. By this standard, government employees (who have accepted paychecks paid for with funds stolen from citizenry by taxes) and criminals whose crimes actually had a victim would be included. Let's call this hypothetical organization "Organization A," or OrgA for short.

True, somebody else might be a little less scrupulous, accepting donations for the termination of ANYBODY regardless of whether he "deserves" his fate (call them "Organization B," or OrgB, for short.) Most potential donors (who, I suggest, would have "typical" levels of scruples) would see that if they patronize OrgB, their interests wouldn't be protected. For example, OrgB (if it survives and thrives) might later come back to target them, because of some other donor. OrgA would not. Naturally, our "ethical" donors don't want this, so they would choose to give their donation to the most "ethical" organization that will accept it. This maximizes the donors' benefit, and minimizes the potential harm.

Since BOTH organizations will accept donations for "deserving" victims, while only OrgB will accept them for "just anybody," it is reasonable to conclude that (capitalism being what it is) OrgB's rates (the percentage of the price it keeps as profit) can be and will be higher for its donations (that's because there is less competition in its area of specialization.) Thus, it would be more economical to target "deserving" people through OrgA, and thus donors will be drawn to it. In addition, OrgA will become larger, more credible, believable and trustworthy, and more potential "guessers" (assassins?) will "work" its system, and for lower average potential payments (all else being equal.) Even so, and ironically, the average donation level for people listed by OrgA would likely be higher, since (if we assume these are "deserving" people) more people will be contributing towards their demise.

After all, if a potential donor wants to "hit" some government bigwig, there will be PLENTY of other donors to share the cost with. Millions of donations of \$1 to \$10 each would be common and quite economical. On the other hand, if you just selected a target out of the telephone directory, an "undeserving" target, you'll probably be the only person wanting to see him dead, which means that you'll probably have to foot the whole bill of perhaps \$5K to \$10K if you want to see any "action." Add to that OrgB's "cut," which will probably be 50%, and you're talking \$10K to \$20K. I contend that the likelihood of this kind of thing actually happening will be quite low, for "undeserving victims."

Now, the die-hards among you will probably object to the fact that even this tiny residual possibility is left. But consider: Even _today_ it would be quite "possible" for you to pick a name randomly out of a list, find him and kill him yourself. Does this frequently happen? Apparently not. For just one thing, there's no real motive. Unless you can show that the application of "assassination politics" would dramatically increase the likelihood of such incidents, I suggest that this "problem" will likely not be a problem after all.

For a while, I thought that the "lack of a motive" protection was momentarily overturned by a hypothetical: I thought, suppose a person used this system as part of a sophisticated extortion scheme, in which he sends an anonymous message to some rich character, saying something like "pay me a zillion dollars anonymously, or I put out a digital contract on you." For a while, this one had me stumped. Then, I realized that an essential element in this whole play was missing: If this could be done ONCE, it could be done a dozen times. And the victim of such an extortion scheme has no assurance that it won't happen again, even if he pays off, so ironically he has no motivation to pay off the extortion. Think about it: The only reason to make the payment is to remove the threat. If making the payment can't

guarantee to the target that the threat is removed, he has no reason to make the payment. And if the target has no reason to make the payment, the extortionist has no reason to make the threat!

Another, related (and equally simplistic) fear is that political minorities will be preferentially targeted. For example, when I pointed out that "establishment" political leaders would probably "go" quite quickly, one wag suggested to me that "libertarian leaders" could likewise be targeted. Such a suggestion reflects a serious misunderstanding of political philosophy, and libertarians in particular: I consider it obvious (to me, at least) that libertarians NEED no leaders. (You don't need leaders if you don't want to control a population, or achieve political power. The only reason libertarians "need" leaders today is to take places in the government and (then) to shut it down.) And if my idea is implemented, "libertarian leaders" represent no more of a threat to anyone than the average libertarian citizen.

Fully recognizing this, another (and far more credible) person thought a while, and in a proud revelation suggested that one way that the establishment would "fight back" is to convert to a government that is based on fully decentralized authority, as opposed to the leader-centric system we have today. Such a system could not be attacked by killing individual people, any more than you can kill a tree by pulling off a single leaf. His "solution" was, in effect, to totally disband the current government and turn it over to the public at large, where it highly de-centralized system that is not controlled by a tiny fraction of the population in a structure called a "government," essentially identical to his idea. So in effect, the only way the government can survive is to totally surrender. And once it surrenders, the people win. And in practice, it will have no alternative.

Will this idea be "out of control"? To a great extent, that depends on what your definition of the word "control." I have come to believe that "assassination politics" is a political Rorschach (ink-blot) test: What you think of it is strongly related to your political philosophy.

Part 7

Dear libertarian Friend,

I very much understand the concerns you voiced about my idea which I call, "Assassination Politics," because this essay is nothing if it is not radical and extreme. I wrote it, in the middle of last year, partly because I think libertarianism and libertarians in particular need to address what is, if not a contradiction, is at least an intolerable reality: On the one hand, we are told not to initiate aggression, but on the other we are aggressed against by the government every time it collects a tax.

I much appreciate the way some people I know have "dropped out" of the system, and the guts that such a tactic requires. But that's the problem, I think: Only those with the "guts" do it, which gives the government fewer targets so that it can spend more time attacking the few who oppose it. The reality is that the government STILL collects taxes, and it STILL uses that money to violate our rights. We all know that's wrong.

My position is quite simple: If tax collection constitutes aggression, then anyone doing it or assisting in the effort or benefiting from the proceeds thereof is a criminal. This is quite analogous to current law that prosecutes co-conspirators. While I am not holding out "current law" as some sort of gold-standard of reasonableness that we must always accept, on the other hand I think it's plausible to use it to show that once we have come to the conclusion that taxation is theft, the prescription follows directly by a form of reasoning allegedly acceptable to society: It is reasonable to "attack the attackers" and their co-conspirators, and everyone who is employed by the government is thus a co-conspirator, even if he is not directly involved in the collection of those taxes. That's because he IS involved in benefiting from the

proceeds of these taxes, and he presumably provides a certain level of "backup" to the young thugs that governmental organizations often hire.

I realize, and you should too, that the "non-aggression principle" says nothing about the EXTENT of the self-defense/retaliation that one might reasonably employ in defending one's own rights: In a sense, that sounds like an omission because it at least suggests that a person might "unreasonably" defend himself with lethal force when far less drastic means might normally be called for. For what it's worth, I think most people will behave responsibly. But I think it is pretty straightforward to argue that whatever means are necessary to stop the attack, are reasonable given the terms of the non-aggression principle: If a given means are known to be inadequate to actually stop the attack, then further and more serious means are reasonable and called-for.

To set up a reasonable analogy, if I'm walking down the canonical "dark alley" and am accosted by a man wielding a knife threatening me with it, it is presumably reasonable for me to pull a gun and threaten back, or possibly take the encounter to the final conclusion of gunfire. Even if I should choose to hold my fire and test to determine whether my actions deterred him, I can't see that this possibility binds me morally. And should he advance, despite the gun, as if to attack, I should feel no remorse in shooting him and taking myself out of danger. If you accept the premises so far, you apparently accept the principle that escalation of the self-defense/retaliation is reasonable as long as if the current level of returned counter-threat is inadequate to stop the aggression initiated by the other party. To believe otherwise is to believe that ultimately, you are obligated to accept a certain high level of aggression simply because you do not have the resources (yet) to resist it. I totally reject this concept, as I hope you would.

So if, hypothetically, I could have an anonymous conversation with a hard-nosed government employee, and asked him, "If I killed one of your agents, would you stop trying to collect that tax from me," his predictable reaction would be, "no, we would continue to try to collect that tax." In fact, he would probably hasten to add that he would try to have me prosecuted for murder, as well! If I were to ask if killing ten agents would stop them, again they would presumably say that this would not change their actions.

The conclusion is, to me, obvious: Clearly, there is no practical limit to the amount of self-defense that I would need to protect my assets from the government tax collector, and to actually stop the theft, so I suggest that logic requires that I be morally and ethically allowed (under libertarian principles) to use whatever level of self-defense I choose.

You raised another objection that quite frankly I believe is invalid. I believe you implied that until a specific level of escalation is reached (such as the Feds showing up on your doorstep, etc) then it is not legitimate to defend oneself. Delicately, I must disagree. As we all well know, government ultimately operates primarily not on actual, applied force, but simply the threat of future force if you do not comply. True, there are people who have decided to call the government's bluff and simply drop out, but the reality is that this is not practical for most individuals today. This is no accident: The government makes it difficult to drop out, because they extort the cooperation of banks and potential employers and others with which you would otherwise be able to freely contract. In any case, I fail to see how not "dropping out" makes one somehow morally obligated to pay a tax (or tolerate the collection of one). I trust you did not inadvertently mean to suggest this.

The reason, morally, we are entitled to shoot the mugger if he waves the knife in our face is that he has threatened us with harm, in this case to our lives, but the threat the government represents to the average citizen (loss of one's entire assets) is just as real, albeit somewhat different. Since government is a past

reality, and a present reality, and has the immediate prospects of being a future reality as well, I sincerely believe that the average citizen can legitimately consider himself CONTINUOUSLY threatened. The aggression has already occurred, in continuously occurring, and has every prospect of continuing to occur. If anything would justify fighting back, this would.

To continue the analogy, if you've been repeatedly mugged by the same guy down the same dark alley for each day of last month, that DOES NOT mean that you've somehow consented to the situation, or that your rights to your assets have somehow been waived. With my "Assassination Politics" essay, I simply proposed that we (as libertarians as well as being ordinary citizens) begin to treat aggression by government as being essentially equivalent to aggression by muggers, rapists, robbers, and murderers, and view their acts as a continuing series of aggressions. Seen this way, it should not be necessary to wait for their NEXT aggression; they will have always have been aggressing and they will always BE aggressing, again and again, until they are stopped for good.

At that point, the question shifted to one of practicality: Sure, theoretically we might morally have the "right" to protect ourselves with lethal force, but if they have any reputation at all, government agents have a habit of showing up in large numbers when they actually apply direct force. To take a position that you can only defend yourself when _they've_ chosen the "where" and "when" of the confrontation is downright suicidal, and I hope you understand that I would consider any such restriction to be highly unfair and totally impractical. Understand, too, that the reason we're still stuck under the thumb of the government is that to the extent it's true, "we've" been playing by THEIR rules, not by our own. By our own rules, THEY are the aggressors and we should be able to treat them accordingly, on our own terms, at our own convenience, whenever we choose, especially when we feel the odds are on our side.

I understand, obviously, that the "no initiation of aggression" principle is still valid, but please recognize that I simply don't consider it to be a valid counter-argument to "Assassination Politics," at least as applied to targets who happen to be government agents. They've "pre-aggressed," and I don't see any limit to the defenses I should be able to muster to stop that aggression completely and permanently. Not that I don't see a difference between different levels of guilt: I fully recognize that some of them are far worse than others, and I would certainly not treat a lowly Forest Service grunt in the same fashion as an ATF sniper.

Now, there is one more thing that I would hope we could get straight: As I originally "invented" this system, it occurred to me that there could be certain arguments that it needed to be "regulated" somehow; "unworthy" targets shouldn't be killed, etc. The "problem" is, what I've "invented" may (as I now believe it to be) actually a "discovery," in a sense: I now believe this kind of system was always inevitable, merely waiting for the triad of the Internet, digital cash, and good encryption in order to provide the technical underpinnings for the entire system. If that is genuinely the case, then there is no real way to control it, except by free-market principles.

It would be impossible, for example, to set up some sort of "Assassination Politics Dictator," who decides who will live and who will die, because competition in the system will always rise to supply every demand, albeit at possibly a very high price. And if you believe the maxim that "absolute power corrupts absolutely," you wouldn't want to accept any form of centralized control (even, perhaps, that of your own!), because any such control would eventually be corrupted. Most rational people recognize this, and I do too. I would not have invented a system where "Jim Bell" gets to make "all the decisions." Quite the contrary, the system I've described absolutely prevents such centralization. That, quite frankly, is the novelty and dare I say it, the beauty of this idea. I believe that it simply cannot be hijacked by centralized political control.

As I pointed out in the essay, if I were running one of the organizations accepting those donations and offering those prizes, I would selectively list only those targets that I am genuinely satisfied are guilty of the violation of the "non-aggression principle." But as a practical matter, there is no way that I could stop a DIFFERENT organization from being set up and operating under DIFFERENT moral and ethical principles, especially if it operated anonymously, as I anticipate the "Assassination Politics"-type systems will be. Thus, I'm forced to accept the reality that I can't dictate a "strongly limited" system that would "guarantee" no "unjustified" deaths: I can merely control my little piece of the earth and not assist in the abuse of others. I genuinely believe, however, that the operation of this system would be a vast improvement over the status quo.

This, I argue, is somewhat analogous to an argument that we should be entitled to own firearms, despite the fact that SOME people will use them wrongly/immorally/illegally. The ownership is a right even though it may ultimately allow or enable an abuse that you consider wrong and punishable. I consider the truth of such an argument to be obvious and correct, and I know you would too.

I realize that this lacks the crisp certitude of safety that would be reassuring to the average, "pre-libertarian" individual. But you are not the "average individual" and I trust that as long-time libertarians you will recognize rights must exist even given the hypothetical possibility that somebody may eventually abuse them.

I do not know whether I "invented" or "discovered" this system; perhaps it's a little of both. I do genuinely believe that this system, or one like it, is as close to being technologically inevitable as was the invention of firearms once the material we now know as "gunpowder" was invented. I think it's on the way, regardless of what we do to stop it. Perhaps more than anyone else on the face of this planet, this notion has filled me, sequentially and then simultaneously, with awe, astonishment, joy, terror, and finally, relief.

Awe, that a system could be produced by a handful of people that would rid the world of the scourge of war, nuclear weapons, governments, and taxes. Astonishment, at my realization that once started, it would cover the entire globe inexorably, erasing dictatorships both fascistic and communistic, monarchies, and even so-called "democracies," which as a general rule today are really just the facade of government by the special interests. Joy, that it would eliminate all war, and force the dismantling not only of all nuclear weapons, but also all militaries, making them not merely redundant but also considered universally dangerous, leaving their "owners" no choice but to dismantle them, and in fact no reason to KEEP them!

Terror, too, because this system may just change almost EVERYTHING how we think about our current society, and even more for myself personally, the knowledge that there may some day be a large body of wealthy people who are thrown off their current positions of control of the world's governments, and the very-real possibility that they may look for a "villain" to blame for their downfall. They will find one, in me, and at that time they will have the money and (thanks to me, at least partially) the means to see their revenge. But I would not have published this essay if I had been unwilling to accept the risk.

Finally, relief. Maybe I'm a bit premature to say it, but I'm satisfied we will be free. I'm convinced there is no alternative. It may feel like a roller-coaster ride on the way there, but as of today I think our destination is certain. Please understand, we will be free.

Your libertarian friend,

Jim Bell

jimbell@pacifier.com

Something is going to happen... Something... Wonderful!

Part 8

The following article appeared in the Sunday, February 4, 1996 issue of Asahi Evening News, in an article written by columnist Paul Maxwell, page 6. He writes a regular column about the Internet for this newspaper.

"Networks: Paul Maxwell"

"Dial Internet for murder"

"The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers." (Shakespeare, Henry VI).

A startling and controversial idea has surfaced on the Internet recently--fear with me for a moment while I explain it. It is based on two technological developments: digital cash and encryption software.

Briefly, digital cash is a system for transferring funds from one person to another on the Net. For this system to be as good as cash, the transactions must be capable of being conducted anonymously, just like in real life. (You go into the Seven-Eleven, buy a Cafe Latte, and nobody knows your name or your credit history. The purchase is not recorded in a database of your consumer preferences.)

Several competing schemes for digital cash have been launched, but the one that eventually gains universal acceptance will surely have this anonymity feature.

The second innovation is a kind of software called public-key encryption. It allows you to send a file or an email message that is "locked" in such a way that it can only be opened by the intended recipient. The recipient, however, cannot open it until given a "key." This "key" may then be used to encrypt a return message that can only be opened by the original sender.

Freelance visionary and tinkerer Jim Bell has been following both of these developments for the past few years. Recently, he asked himself a couple of tough questions: "How can we translate the freedom afforded by the Internet to ordinary life?" How can we keep government from banning encryption, digital cash, and other systems that will improve our freedom?"

Suddenly, Bell had a revolutionary idea. ("Revolutionary" is the word he uses, and it fits.) You and me--the little guys, the ordinary working people of the world--could get together, all pitch in, and pay to have every rotten scoundrel in politics assassinated. And we could do it legally. Sort of. Bell imagined an organization that would award "a cash prize to somebody who correctly 'predicted' the death of one of a list of violators of rights, usually either government employees, officeholders, or appointees. It could ask for anonymous contributions from the public, and individuals would be able to send those contributions using digital cash."

He explains that "using modern methods of public-key encryption and anonymous digital cash, it would be possible to make such awards in such a way so that nobody knows who is getting awarded the money, only that the award is being given. Even the organization itself would have no information that could help the authorities find the person responsible for the prediction, let alone the one who caused the death. "Are you following this? Let's say that we, the public, decide we've finally had enough of [insert name of villain]. Ten dollars from me, ten from you--suddenly there's a million dollars in a fund. The money will go to the first person that can "predict" the date, time, and circumstances of the villain's death. Obviously, this information is only known in advance by the assassin.

He sends an anonymous, "locked" message. He kills the villain. He sends the "key" to the message. He has, without ever revealing his identity, "correctly predicted" the murder. The "key" that he has

provided is then used to "lock the award money in a file that is then publicly posted on the Internet. Only the person who originated the key may open the file and claim the digital cash.

In other words, public anger could finance cash awards for assassinations. The organization that collected the money and announced a list of possible targets would never know about a crime in advance, and would never know the identity or whereabouts of a criminal. It would not technically be guilty of conspiracy or complicity.

Jim Bell has thought about this a lot, and feels that the idea is technically feasible, practical, even foolproof. Suppose for a moment he's right? What are the implications?

World leaders live with the threat of assassination every day of their lives. But at the local level, this could really have an impact. And the "target" list wouldn't necessarily to politicians--any offensive public personality would be fair game. Picture yourself a year from now, sitting around with friends. Somebody says, "Remember when Juice Newton got whacked?" And you say, "Yeah--best ten bucks I ever spent."

Satisfying as it might be to declare war on asinine pop singers, Bell has a more civic-minded suggestion: Let's kill all the car thieves. He reasons that a very small number of career criminals are responsible for nearly all car thefts. If one million car owners in a given metropolitan area contributed just four dollars a year, it would create \$10,000 a day in "prize money" for the "predictor" of any car thief's death.

"Assuming that amount is far more than enough to get a typical car thief's 'friends' to 'off' him," he writes, "there is simply no way that a substantial car-theft subculture could possibly be maintained."

Jim as high hopes for his plan--he thinks it could eventually lead to the end of political tyranny. But if you don't like this idea, he has others. In a recent email exchange, I asked what he was doing now.

"I recommend that you rent the movie, "The Day the Earth Stood Still," he answered. "I'm working on a similar project."

Part 9

by Jim Bell, February 27, 1996

For about a year I have been considering the implications of "Assassination Politics," and for more than six months I've been sharing the subject and my musings with you, the interested reader. I've also been debating the issue with all comers, a self-selected bunch who range from enthusiastic proponents to clueless critics. Ironically, some of you have even chided me for "wasting time" with some of the less perceptive among my numerous "opponents." In defense, my response has always been that when I respond to a person, I do it not primarily for his benefit, but for others who might be fence-sitting and are waiting to see if my idea will break down anywhere.

If there is anything which has fascinated me as much as the original idea, it is this vast and dramatic disparity between these various responses. It's been called everything from "a work of genius" to "atrocious," and probably much worse! Clearly, there must be a fundamental, social issue here that needs to be resolved.

While nobody has quite yet said it in those terms, I'm sure that more than one of you have probably wanted to react to my prose with the line, "See a shrink!" [American slang for a psychiatrist, for the international readers out there.] Well, in a sense that's exactly what I did, but the "shrink" I "saw" had been dead for over five decades: Sigmund Freud. Much to my surprise, I was handed a copy of a book,

Introduction to Great Books (ISBN 0-945159-97-8), which contained (page 7) a letter from Freud to Albert Einstein. On page 6, there is an introduction, describing the reason for this communication. It says:

"In 1932, the League of Nations asked Albert Einstein to choose a problem of interest to him and to exchange views with someone about it. Einstein chose "Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war?" as his problem and Sigmund Freud as his correspondent. In his letter to Freud, Einstein said that one way of eliminating war was to establish a supranational organization with the authority to settle disputes between nation as and power to enforce its decisions. But Einstein acknowledged that this solution dealt only with the administrative aspect of the problem, and that international security could never be achieved until more was known about human psychology. Must right always be supported by might? Was everyone susceptible to feelings of hate and destructiveness? It was to these questions Freud addressed himself in his reply."

Interestingly enough, when I first started thinking about the idea that I would later term "Assassination Politics," I was not intending to design a system that had the capability to eliminate war and militaries. What I was targeting, primarily, was political tyranny. By my standards, that included not merely totalitarian governments but also ones that many of us would consider far more benign, in particular the Federal government of the United States of America, "my" country. Only after I had thought of the fundamental principle of allowing large numbers of citizens to do away with unwanted politicians was I "forced," by my work up to that point, to address the issue of the logical consequences of the operation of that system, which (by "traditional" ways of thinking) would leave this country without leaders, or a government, or a military, in a world with many threats. I was left with the same fundamental problem that's plagued the libertarian analysis of forming a country in a world dominated by non-libertarian states: It was not clear how such a country could defend itself from aggression if it could not force its citizens to fight.

Only then did I realize that if this system could work within a single country, it could also work worldwide, eliminating threats from outside the country as well as corrupt politicians within. And shortly thereafter, I realized that not only could this occur, such a spread was absolutely inevitable, by the very nature of modern communications across the Internet, or older technologies such as the telephone, fax, or even letters written on paper. In short, no war need ever occur again, because no dispute would country he intended to war with, obviously, but he would also draw the ire of citizens within his own country who either didn't want to pay the taxes to support a wasteful war, or lose their sons and daughters in pointless battles, or for that matter were simply opposed to participating in the aggression. Together, all these potentially affected peoples would unite (albeit quite anonymously, even from each other) and destroy the tyrant before he had the opportunity to make the war.

I was utterly astonished. Seemingly, and without intending to do so, I had provided a solution for the "war" problem that has plagued mankind for millennia. But had I? I really don't know. I do know, however, that very few people have challenged me on this particular claim, despite what would normally appear to be its vast improbability. While some of the less perceptive critics of "Assassination Politics" have accused me of eliminating war and replace it with something that will end up being worse, it is truly amazing that more people haven't berated me for not only believing in the impossible, but also believing that the impossible is now actually inevitable!

A little more than a week ago, I was handed this book, and asked to read Freud's letter, by a person who was aware of my "little" philosophical quandary. I began to read Freud's letter in response to Einstein, having never read any other word Freud had written, and having read essentially none of the works of

the giants of Philosophy. (Now, of course, I feel tremendously guilty at the omission in my education, but I've always been attracted more to the "hard sciences," like chemistry, physics, mathematics, electronics, and computers.) Since this letter was specifically on war, and the question of whether man could ever avoid it, I felt perhaps it would contain some fact or argument that would correct what was simply a might end up being right, but alternatively hoped that if wrong, I would be soon corrected. I was fearful that I was wrong, but also fearful that there would be nothing in this essay that would assist me in my analysis of the situation.

About a third of the way through Freud's letter, I had my answer. Below, I show a segment of Freud's reply, perhaps saving the whole letter for inclusion into a later part of this ongoing essay. While I could drastically oversimplify the situation and state, "Freud was wrong!," it turns out that this brief conclusion is at best highly misleading and at worst flirting with dishonesty. By far the greater part of Freud's analysis makes a great deal of sense to me, and I would say he's probably correct. But it is at one point that I believe he goes just a bit wrong, although for reasons which are entirely understandable and even predictable, given the age in which he lived. It must be remembered, for example, that Freud was born into an era where the telephone was a new invention, broadcast radio was non-existent, and newspapers were the primary means that news was communicated to the public. It would be highly unreasonable for us to have expected Freud to have anticipated developments such as the Internet, anonymous digital cash, and good public-key encryption.

In some sense, at that point, my biggest regret was that I couldn't discuss the issue with either of these two communicants, Freud having died in 1939, and Einstein in 1955, after having helped initiate research that led to the development of the atomic bomb, the weapon that for decades and even now, makes it absolutely, vitally important to eliminate the possibility of war from the world.

But I'll let Dr. Freud speak, as he spoke over sixty years ago, because he has much to say:

"Such then, was the original state of things: domination by whoever had the greater might--domination by brute violence or by violence supported by intellect. As we know, this regime was altered in the course of evolution. There was a path that led from violence to right or law. What was that path? It is my belief that there was only one: the path which led by way of the fact that the superior strength of a single individual could be rivaled by the union of several weak ones. "L'union fait la force." [French; In union there is strength.] Violence could be broken by union, and the power of those who were united now represented law in contrast to the violence of the single individual. Thus we see that right is the might of a community. It is still violence, ready to be directed against any individual who resists it; it works by the same methods and follows the same purposes. The only real difference lies in the fact that what prevails is no longer the violence of an individual but that of a community."

[But below is where I think Freud falls into a certain degree of error, perhaps not by the standards and realities of his day, but those of ours. My comments are in square brackets,], and Freud's comments are quoted "". Freud continues:]

"But in order that the transition from violence to this new right or justice may be effected, one psychological condition must be fulfilled. The union of the majority must be a stable and lasting one. If it were only brought about for the purpose of combating a single dominant individual and were dissolved after his defeat, nothing would be accomplished. The next person who though himself superior in strength would once more seek to set up a dominion by violence and the game would be repeated ad infinitum. The community must be maintained permanently, must be organized, must draw up regulations to anticipate the risk of rebellion and must institute authorities to see that those regulations--the laws-- are respected and to superintend the execution of legal acts of violence. The recognition of a

community of interests such as these leads to the growth of emotional ties between the members of a united group of people--communal feelings which are the true source of its strength." [end of Freud's quote]

[Those of you who truly comprehend the idea of "Assassination Politics" will, I'm confident, understand exactly why I considered this segment of Freud's letter to be important enough to include, and will probably also recognize why I consider Freud's analysis to go wrong, albeit for comparatively minor and understandable reasons. I will address the last paragraph in greater detail, to explain what I mean. I will repeat Freud's words, and address each of his points from the standpoint of today's situation and technology.]

"But in order that the transition from violence to this new right or justice may be effected, one psychological condition must be fulfilled. The union of the majority must be a stable and lasting one." [In a sense, Freud is absolutely correct: Whatever system is chosen to "govern" a society, it must continue to operate "forever."] Freud continues:

"If it were only brought about for the purpose of combating a single dominant individual and were dissolved after his defeat, nothing would be accomplished."

[This is where the problem begins to creep in. Freud is leading up to justifying the existence of a formal government as he knew them in the 1930's, based on the continuing need for keeping the peace. The first, and I think, the most obvious problem is that Freud seems to implicitly assume that the purpose of the union will actually be fulfilled by the formation of a government. Freud, who died in 1939, didn't see what his survivors saw, a "legitimate" government in Germany having killed millions of people in the Holocaust, or many other incidents subsequent to that. And Freud, whose letter was written in 1932, was probably not aware of the slaughter of the Russian Kulaks in the late 1920's and early 1930's, or the purges that followed. Freud could have felt, generally, that the problems with a country's governance were caused either by inadequate government or simply a rare example of government gone bad. We know, to the contrary, that governments very frequently "go bad," in the sense of violating citizen's rights and abusing the power entrusted to them. Few may end up killing millions, but to assume that we must continue to tolerate governments just because they don't go quite as far as Nazi Germany would be foolish in the extreme.]

[The second problem is the implicit assumption that the long-term control he (correctly) sees MUST come from an organization like a traditional government. True, in the era in which Freud lived, that conclusion made a great deal of sense, because a well-functioning government appeared superior to none at all. And it was at least plausible that such control COULD come from a government. But as the old saying goes, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."]

[To use a house's thermostat as an analogy, but differently than I did in "Assassination Politics part 6," a person who lived in an era before automatic furnace thermostats would always conclude that a person's efforts would have to be continually directed towards maintaining an even temperature in his house, by adding fuel or limiting it, by adding more air or restricting, etc. To the extent that this manual control constitutes a "government," he will believe that this hands-on control will always be necessary. But we now live in a time where a person's time is rarely directed towards this effort, the function having been taken over by automatic thermostats which are cheap, reliable, and accurate. They are also, incidentally, essentially "uncorruptible," in the sense that they don't fail except for "understandable" reasons, and repair is cheap and easy. (And a thermostat can never be bribed, or get tired, or have its own interests at heart and begin to subvert your own commands.) Quite simply, the progress of technology has put

control of temperature in the hands of an automatic, error-free system that is so reliable as to be ignorable most of the time.]

[I argue that likewise, the progress of technology would allow an automatic system to be set up, which I called "Assassination Politics" (but could probably use a more apt name, since its application extends far beyond the issue of politics) different from traditional government, a difference somewhat analogous to the difference between a person's full-time efforts and an automatic thermostat. Aside from the dramatic reduction in effort involved, an automatic system would eliminate the errors caused by inattention by the operator, such as leaving, falling asleep, or other temporary lack of concentration. These failures are somewhat analogous to the failure or misbehavior of a corruptible or indifferent or even a malicious government.]

[This makes a government like Freud saw totally unnecessary. Of course, Freud could not have anticipated the technological developments that would make an "automatic" replacement for government even possible, and thus he followed his contemporary paradigms and sought to justify the governments, as they then existed.] Freud continues:

"The next person who thought himself superior in strength would once more seek to set up a dominion by violence and the game would be repeated ad infinitum."

[This statement is correct, but I think it misses the point: Many functions of individuals and machines are never "completed", and must "be repeated ad infinitum." (The most basic example: If we are optimistic about the future of the human race, by definition reproduction and survival must be "repeated ad infinitum.") That does not mean that the mechanism which handles that need must be any more complicated than the minimum necessary to achieve the control needed. I agree that a system of long-term control is necessary; where I disagree with Freud is simply that I believe that a vastly better method of control now can potentially exist than the traditional governments that he knew. To the extent that he couldn't have anticipated the Internet, anonymous digital cash, and good encryption, he had no reason to believe that government could be "automated" and taken out of the hands of a tiny fraction of the population, a fraction which is corruptible, malicious, and self-interested. Also, by not being aware of modern technology, he is unaware how easy it has become, conceptually, for people to come together for their self-defense, if that self-defense required only a few kilobytes be sent over fiber-optic cables to a central registry. Freud's objection to an "endlessly repeating" system breaks down in this case, so his conclusion need not be considered valid.]

Freud continues:

"The community must be maintained permanently, must be organized, must draw up regulations to anticipate the risk of rebellion and must institute authorities to see that those regulations--the laws-- are respected and to superintend the execution of legal acts of violence."

[Again, I think Freud misses the point. He refers to "the risk of rebellion," but I think he forgets that the main reason for "rebellion" is the abuse by the government then in control. (Naturally, it looks differently from the standpoint of that government!) If the latter problem could be eliminated, "rebellion" would simply never occur, for there would be no reason for it. If those that were "rebellious" were in the wrong, violating somebody's rights, then my "Assassination Politics" system would be able to take care of it. This, presumably and understandably, Freud could never have foreseen. Also, Freud does not address the question of whether or not the government which promulgates those laws is doing so in a way primarily for the benefit of the public, or those who populate the government itself. Graft was well known in Freud's time; it seems to me that he should have addressed the question of whether or not an entity called a "government" could actually achieve the benefits he claims justify the government,

without being subverted by those who control it, for their own interests. If not, then there is certainly an issue to be addressed: At what point do the depredations of a parasitic government exceed its benefits? And can we find a way to do without it?] Freud continues:

"The recognition of a community of interests such as these leads to the growth of emotional ties between the members of a united group of people--communal feelings which are the true source of its strength." [this is end of the portion of Freud's letter which I quote here.]

One of the interesting things about this statement is that it is the development of tools such as the Internet which will be eliminating the very concept of "foreign" and "foreigner." They will become artificial distinctions. There is clearly much precedent for this, from the country in which I live, America. When formed, it contained people whose primary loyalty was to their _state,_ not to the Federal government as a whole. Even our civil war, from 1861 to 1865, was based on loyalty to states or regions, rather than the country as a whole. To cite just one example, myself, while I reside in the state called Washington, I've lived in a number of other states, but I don't consider myself loyal to any particular state. (Perhaps using myself as an example is misleading, because at this point I don't consider myself "loyal" to any government at all!)

In fact, later in Freud's letter, he says, "Anything that encourages the growth of emotional ties between men must operate against war." Sadly, Freud did not live to see the development of the Internet, and the massive international communication which it has already begun to foster. In _his_ day, the ordinary people of one country and another rarely communicated, except perhaps for letters with relatives from "the old country" that emigrated. The idea of going to war with people from whom you get email on a daily basis is, in itself, a "foreign concept" to me, and I hope it will remain so! In that sense, Freud was very right: "Assassination Politics" active or not, it will be much harder for governments to whip up their citizens into a frenzy to kill the enemy if they can type to them every day. Frustratingly left unanswered is a question whose answer I'd like to know: Could I have convinced Freud, or Einstein, that "Assassination Politics" is not only a necessary or even an unavoidable system, but also a GOOD one? Could I convince them today, had they miraculously survived until today, aware of the last 64 years of history subsequent to their correspondence?

Jim Bell

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Klaatu Burada Nikto

Something is going to happen... Something...Wonderful!

Part 10

"Non-Euclidean Thinking" by Jim Bell

An interesting communication I had recently on the subject of "Assassination Politics." My commentary is preceded with >> or nothing; the other person's commentary starts with a ">". The subject is how to actually implement this system, and my first comment notices the fact that despite my efforts, the government has not attempted to use this issue to justify some sort of crackdown on net rights, or anything like that.

I think they're actually afraid to start the debate,

I think they don't believe you're a threat.

You're probably right about this. I guess I'll have to think of something to change their minds, huh?

Remember, they have incredible >amounts of money with which to hire bright but greedy people. All they have to do is find the people running the "Guess the Death Date" lottery. They would have great incentive to apply their considerable resources to this end.

Your logic is excellent. But as strange as it may seem, there may be a different way... Let's see, how do I explain? First, a little diversion that may or may not be relevant to this subject, but initially won't appear to be so.

Somewhere around 20-25 years ago, I read some item concerning Howard Hughes, the late billionaire. It described the history of his business ventures, in fields such as aircraft ("Spruce Goose" is a well-known example) but also mentioned that Hughes Tool was (originally?) into oil-well drilling equipment.

I don't know how much you know about oil well drilling and drill bits, but they look nothing like the classic fluted drill bits common in hardware stores. Oil well drill bits consist of multiple ultra-hard carbide points mounted on rotating shafts mounted at the end of the drill "string," and these shafts must be connected to the main shaft with bearings. They roll around on the rock, not sliding, and they "spall" off pieces of rock due to enormous applied pressure.

Oil well drilling is done by lubricating the drilling operation with what is called "drilling mud," which is actually a slurry of solids in water, which is primarily used to cool the cutter and wash away the rock chips and dust produced in the operation. Now, since the rotating cutter wheels must spin on their axis, that means they have to be run on shafts with bearings installed. These bearings cannot be perfectly sealed and thus protected against rock and mud dust, and their useful lifetime is strongly limited by their quality.

And since every time they wear out the whole drill string has to be pulled from the well, that's an EXTREMELY expensive proposition for well drillers. So it should not be surprising that these guys considered bearing quality to be very, very important. A little improvement was worth a lot of money.

"Quality", to a bearing manufacturer, is strongly related to surface hardness, and traditionally, the best bearings were (and, mostly, still are) the hardest. But there's a problem: Ultimately, a very hard circular bearing rotating on a very hard flat surface (especially if its heavily loaded) applies nearly all its force on a single point (for ball bearings) or on a single line (for roller bearings) and that eventually causes bearing failure. So there was an upper limit, generally, on how good you could get in bearings. And the hardest won. Until Hughes.

[Don't go to sleep yet... it gets relevant real soon]

According to the source I read, what Hughes Tool did that made them really rich was quite simple and counter-intuitive: Rather than trying to make his bearings as HARD as you can get, he made them SOFT, very soft, "almost as soft as lead." (Which, if you know anything about metals, is very soft indeed.) The bearings deformed on their raceways, spreading out the load over a far larger area, and the resulting bearings were the best in the business. (He probably also applied a lot of research into how to avoid "metal fatigue," but that's quite another story.)

Very counter-intuitive, but he "won" precisely because he did exactly the opposite of what everyone "knew" was the proper way to go. Okay, so that explains a genius that later became a billionaire who later turned into a neurotic, or worse. "What," you will ask, "does this all have to do with Assassination Politics?"

Well, to draw an observation originally posited in an essay titled the "Libertech Project," about 7 years ago, libertarians (of all people) are "non-Euclidean thinkers." Basically, this means that we recognize

that the best way to go from "point A" to "point B" is NOT NECESSARILY a straight line. And like Columbus, who sailed west in order to go east, sometimes it is necessary to sit down, and totally re-think your strategy if you're trying to accomplish some goal.

By "classical" thinking, "Assassination Politics" would have to be the best, tightest-security, more protected organization that has ever existed on the face of this planet. Just about EVERY powerful person would want to kill anybody who had anything to do with such a system. The codes would have to be unbreakable, the remailers would have to be certain, but most importantly, each and every participant would have to be perfectly anonymous to even have a prayer of pulling it off. Especially the operators of such a system. Especially them.

That's classical thinking. And that's what I thought a few months ago. I thought, "it's do-able, but it's gonna be a lot of work!"

But let's suppose, for a moment, that somebody "pulls a Hughes." Rather than trying to make the hardest bearings in the world, why doesn't somebody try to make the softest? Rather than trying their darndest to stay anonymous, or wait and let somebody else implement this system, why not just "let it all hang out," (as the saying went in the 1960's) and publicly announce that they're implementing this system, come hell or high water, and invite anyone who wants to participate to help form what will be the LAST revolution on earth, the one that'll take down ALL the governments.

This sounds crazy, right? I mean, who wants to die? Who wants to commit suicide just to... just to... just to... make an ENTIRE WORLD FREE FOREVER? Free from wars, militaries, governments, taxes, political oppression. Free from the kind of totalitarian governments that existed and currently exist. Free from the Holocausts that have killed Jews, Cambodians, Armenians, Russian Kulaks, Iraqi Kurds, Chinese dissidents, Native Americans, and oh so many others? "Who, exactly, would be stupid enough to risk death to make the world free???"

Everyone who volunteered to fight to fight Hitler, to name just one example. Remember, or have we forgotten so soon, that occasionally people die to keep the rest of us free. That's the way it's been for hundreds of years. The United States of America was founded by people who risked death to shake off the yoke of a government that was, by the standards of the day, not particularly bad.

Think about it. Somebody had to be the first one to start banging on the Berlin Wall, with a sledgehammer, in 1989. Somebody had to be the first to walk through. Somebody had to be the first to stand up and say, "Enough!" And the ironic thing is, the most strangely unusual thing, is that the entire Eastern Bloc fell, almost bloodlessly, in a couple weeks, because one by one everybody realized that all that's sometimes required is to finally stand up and be counted, and to just say no to the government. When the time was right, all it took was a slight push and the dominoes tumbled down.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that EVERYONE would be identified. The "donors" to the system would remain perfectly anonymous, and the "guessers" would likewise be perfectly anonymous, but the organization itself would be made up of real people, who have published addresses, who have simply decided that they have had enough of the current system and are going to participate in a PERFECTLY LEGAL enterprise by the laws of the country, and just DARE the government to try to stop them. The organization wouldn't have to buy ads; the publicity firestorm would be enormous. Suddenly, all the politicians would be put on the spot! Instead of being asked by the reporters for their position on the economy, pollution, the budget deficit, or some other thing, they'll ask, "Why should the public NOT want to see you dead?"

When would be the best time to do it? Why, during a major political campaign! When Congress is out of session, and they can't pass legislation without calling some sort of emergency session. But it won't matter anyway, for a few weeks the organization doesn't actually have to take bets or make payments, they'll merely publicize their efforts for all to see. To reassure the public, they could announce that they'll only take bets on elected and appointed political officeholders...and anyone who tries to stop the system. And the politicians will be scurrying around, looking for political cover, trying to figure out how to NOT look scared, but at the same time each is wondering if he'll be the first to go. And all the while, the public will be loving it, laughing at the efforts of the politicians to cover their collective asses, and taking private bets among themselves on who will be the first one to die.

Prosecute the participants? On what charge? "Conspiracy to commit gambling"? Which prosecutor would risk appearing to be impeding the progress of a useful system? At that point, the organization's members will just be publicly exercising their first-amendment rights. Which judge would take the case? Now THEY'RE on the spot, THEY have to decide what to do. I contend that in an election year, before the election, there would be mass resignations from Congress, or members deciding "it's just not fun anymore" and decline to return even if re-elected, as well as the complete loss of whatever residual confidence the public has in the government. Whew! Is this all just wishful thinking? I really don't know!

The Jim Bell System Debate Introduction

Robert Vroman

anti-state.com, July 11, 2002

As I write this article on July 3, 2002, I am already hearing out my window the occasional pops of micro-explosives enthusiasts getting a head start on their annual excuse to play with things that go bang and supposedly celebrate their freedom. Tomorrow, libertarians across the country will use the holiday as an opportunity to grouse to disinterested relatives around the barbecue grill about how little freedom we actually have left, or really ever had. LP lifers often say there is no magic bullet to get the kind of society we want, and it will take decades of hard work in the political trenches, and of course, many many donations to the party, before we ever see progress. Conversely, I propose that a nutty guy named Jim Bell has already designed the magic bullet; it just needs to be forged and we will start seeing dramatic positive change immediately.

Since this is a fairly controversial topic, I will start with a psychological self-analysis as a disclaimer.

My primary long-term goal is to live forever. I'm convinced that the exponential improvements in medical technology will curve upwards to infinity within the next century. This means surviving the relatively primitive period between then and now is the major stumbling block. As an atheist, I am faced with the conclusion that this is the only life I have. Therefore I have an enormous incentive to minimize risks to my health and well being, just as a Christian has incentive not to sin; we both would be gambling our presumed eternal life, an unacceptable wager. One such risk I will choose to decline is taking up arms against the United States government. Thus the powers that be who may read this article can rest assured that I will be exhibiting more or less cowardly behavior for the next 75 years or so, and present no security threat whatsoever.

I am simply predicting what will happen and am no more responsible for the outcome than an astronomer who reveals that an asteroid is on course to wipe out DC. Hopefully, the destruction of this particular doomsday rock will be localized around the tyrants.

With that said, I present the following dangerous idea.

My secondary long-term goal is to live free. By that I mean living in a stable, secure, anarcho-capitalist society. The obvious obstacle to this goal is the existence of the State. The problems I face generally in eradicating this persistent pest are that:

- 1.The State is actively retarding the progress of science, thus making my immortality timetable more and more dicey.
- 2.There aren't a whole lot of capital resources or individuals enlightened enough to be on my side.
- 3.If I die in the process, either from fighting a revolution or from allowing the state to last too long, stalling out science, it will all be for naught (from my perspective anyway)

The challenge then is to devise a plan to remove this obstacle, balancing the considerations of speed, cost, and safety.

In a recent article John T. Kennedy made the excellent point, using the example of a porcupine, that in order to avoid being eaten, one need not necessarily be anywhere near as powerful as the predator, only become an overpriced meal. The historical example of Switzerland in WWII comes to mind. Clearly, with a concentrated effort, the Nazi war machine could have decimated the small neutral country. In fact, Hitler boasted early on in the war that he would "be the butcher of the Swiss." However, the Swiss militia system was able to mobilize a half million trained riflemen within 48 hours of that pronouncement. Once entrenched in foreboding Alpine terrain, they were ordered to defend the border "to the last cartridge." The Fuhrer decided to pass on that challenge and instead waltzed through Denmark and France, countries with little to no civilian gun culture.

For our purposes, the State is the predator, and we are the prey. Kennedy mentioned (with appropriate caveats) that Assassination Politics would be one possible method to grow some quills, and raise our price beyond the power monger's ability to pay. Briefly, the AP system, as I envision its probable implementation, would operate something like this. You come across, say, "www.jimbellsystem.com" and see a long list of names next to dollar amounts. You are then invited to select a name and then submit a guess as to the exact date this person will expire, in exchange for some standard betting fee, like \$1, via some as yet undeveloped digital cash scheme. Your dollar is then added to the total on the master list. You can repeat this process as many times, on as many names as you like, or even submit a new name. Strong cryptography protects your anonymity in all cases.

Then when someone on the list inevitably is reaped, the site operator examines all the winning bets (if any) and divides the prize evenly among them, after taking a small percentage as commission. The prize money is then forwarded to anonymous digital cash accounts that the winning bettors indicated when they submitted their entries. In other words, it's just a standard betting pool system except with paranoid security, and a rather macabre theme. However, the catch is that once a particular name gets some serious cash associated with it, say \$1M+, there will be a strong motivation for an unscrupulous bettor to tip the odds dramatically in his favor via direct intervention in the subject's death. The further catch is that many of the average, non-homicidal bettors will be aware that such unscrupulous opportunists exist and will play the game without any real ambition to randomly pick a correct date, but instead place bets to drive up the prize on persons they despise. The theory goes that politicians will be high on everyone's shit list, and be the first to rack up attention-getting prize pools. To be wildly optimistic, it is proposed that there will be so many people with a pet peeve against a specific politician, whether they are consciously anarchist or not, that the system will foster a niche industry in assassination, and the collective actions of the market will thereafter make it incredibly dangerous for anyone to seek positions

of power. Thus, the people who currently constitute the entity known as government will either die or fearfully resign en masse, and the State will disintegrate.

The fully idealistic conclusion is that this will result in permanent, defensible anarchism, since AP can be just as easily applied to any neo-statists who show up afterward, or any foreign aggressors, assuming there are any states left lacking sufficient internet connectivity to have previously ousted their own rulers.

That's the summary, I will now debunk the many criticisms of the system, which fall into three broad categories:

1. Practical failures

2. Moral failures

3. Strategic failures

In the first category are objections along practical lines for its basic operation. First of all, is it technically feasible? I am not a programmer, nor even done much homework in the area of encryption/digital cash, however, there are people out there who are certainly experts who seem to think that both of those concepts have a very strong future. For further information on relevant technical matters, I direct you to J. Orlin Grabbe, who does not to my knowledge endorse any form of AP, but does treat the reader to some creative selections of soft porn.

Since I am under-educated in this field, I, unfortunately, will have to pass on any specific technical objections. Logically, though, it seems reasonable to compare the operation of this system to something like a drug cartel. South American drug lords are well known for having top-notch computer systems to keep track of their own affairs, as well as keep tabs on what competitors and Federales are up to. Such cartels are historically very good at surviving against ever increasing law enforcement budgets and political pressure. Since AP's main business is in computers, and it will most likely be very profitable, it leads me to think that electronically evading cops by similar means may not be a hopeless task.

The second practical objection I will cover is a worst-case scenario, where, in its desperation, the state retaliates against AP by banning non-governmental digital cash entirely. Feds shuts down Paypal and anything like it, and only allow e-cash that's connected to the magnetic stripe on your National ID, and every transaction monitored.

This unfortunate news bulletin can be handled several ways by AP's patrons. To go back to our drug cartel analogy, keep in mind that many millions of people around the world flout the law daily to buy, sell and consume illegal pharmaceuticals. Distributors of drugs are everywhere if you know where to look. It is not so hard to imagine an identical network of underground suppliers could meet the demand for anonymous currency, for any number of purposes, not just AP. This could take the form of cash servers completely off the fed grid, or front companies that accept government e-cash and launder it for discreet uses. Depending on the exact nature of whatever new authoritarian legislation gets handed down, any number of solutions could present themselves, and those same millions of current lawbreakers will no doubt solicit them just as eagerly. And the added bonus is there is no physical evidence to be unconstitutionally searched and seized, as is the threat in the drug trade. A few kilobytes of data are probably easier to hide than a trunk full of plant extracts.

In the same vein, the State might get extremely paranoid, and attempt to ban all encryption lacking FBI backdoors. Assuming that civil libertarians are not sufficiently "concerned" to prevent this, more important is the basic impracticality of enforcement. Analogy: It is 2050 and in an understandable appeal

to public safety, the Feds outlaw recently invented personal invisibility cloaks. Stormtroopers arrive at my apartment building and question my neighbors. “We have a warrant for the arrest of Robert Vroman for the alleged possession of an illegal invisibility cloak. Have you seen him? No? Hmm.”

Again my technical ignorance may get in the way, but if I can hide the content of my message, how hard is it to hide the source and destination? Internet-savvy outlaws will undoubtedly provide encryption services under the Gestapo’s nose, just like their outlaw digicash cousins, and their outlaw drug peddler ancestors.

But then what if the State, facing imminent destruction, lashes out blindly and tries to shut down the whole friggin internet? Or what if they establish martial law in the scariest uber-polizei-stadt since Adolf was dancing jigs? These and other Orwellian nightmares are possibilities. However, one must consider that any path to anarchism will eventually take us to a point to where the State is cornered and crazed, and thus this is not the fault of AP. On the bright side though, if it is AP that takes us to that juncture, any measures the State take will be short-lived and futile. While they may be able to hold off an armed rebellion or mass non-compliance and make our lives miserable for an indefinite period, AP will march along inexorably chowing down on their human resources and scaring them off, until there’s simply no one left to give orders or receive them.

The third practical objection wonders if anyone will actually put money into AP, above or below ground. Clearly, there will have to be a significant and constant cash flow to keep the wheels turning and the heads rolling. Finding customers is probably the least of our worries. First, on the list are the usual suspects of political extremists.

Hardcore lefties in all their myriad flavors: commies, left-anarchists, eco nuts, feminazis, etc.

Then your hardcore righties: militia psychos, pro-life zealots, Klansmen, dirty cops, uber-moralists, etc

Following with miscellaneous baddies: well heeled foreign terrorists, cultists, sleaze corporations, garden variety sociopaths, drug lords, etc

And that’s just the fringe. I propose that humans as a whole are not very good people. If they were, surely we would not be in the prevailing unacceptable state of affairs. Fortunately one of the main selling points of libertarianism is that it’s the superior system given any level of general morality. In the short term though, AP is well served by the relatively low level evidenced by reality. I predict that given a consequence free chance to hurt someone they despise at low monetary cost, a large percentage will sign up. American citizens donate many millions to political parties every year; clearly they take this stuff seriously. How bad do they want their guy to win? Remember, no one will ever know if you place that bet. You can protest the senselessness of it all in public, wring your hands over the latest poor public servant killed in the line of duty, and then go home and secretly sign the death warrant of that Congress asshole who wants to cut your kid’s daycare. Seriously, look at the kind of people around you, who wouldn’t jump at the chance at that kind of power?

Practically anyone with any political opinions at all can name some office holder they’d rather see gone. It should be no challenge to get enough people with the same name in mind to bet a few bucks and reach a tempting pot.

These people may not be betting against the worst statists in the order an Ancap might prioritize them, but the point is, it doesn’t matter who they bet on, as long as they hit any power holders, because most likely the success of AP will not come from systematically executing every politician, but instead drive them into hiding from fear of their name rising on the list. No matter what direction the fire is coming from, it will keep everyone in Washington’s head down.

But just to drive the point home, forget about Americans who might unexpectedly turn uniformly patriotic and override their petty partisan proclivities. For an easier challenge, let's toss AP into the mix of some stormy banana republic below the equator. Giving AP to practically any 3rd world country would be like letting the rival faction leaders duel with grenades in a shower stall. Every wannabe El Presidente will openly encourage their followers to bet against the competition and undoubtedly receive the same in return. If you find Somalia encouraging, imagine the entire developing world forced to go the same route.

So I think I've established that there will be sufficient demand, the other side of the coin is of course supply. Again, we are well stocked. Last I read, the home of the brave here has some 2 million people imprisoned, 40% of which are deemed 'violent'. Furthermore, approximately 1% of all violent crimes result in a prisoner. This says to me that there is an abundance of dumb mean folks in this country. One characteristic of the violence prone is they tend to be poor. I imagine that few such criminals actually enjoy risking their life and freedom day after day in robbing random people for watches and wallets. How many would gamble on that One Big Score, if payday were a sure thing?

To name a few, we've got the obvious examples, Mafiosos, Hell's Angels, Islamo-fascists, McVeigh acolytes, etc, plus a virtually bottomless supply of standard small time thugs and starving junkies.

In other words lots and lots of people who wouldn't think twice about killing anyone for the right price or cause, all being simultaneously offered heaping mounds of cash with no names being mentioned, no questions asked, and no one to have to trust. All guaranteed and anonymous. And the best part is, there's no need for the ideologically pure to go fling ourselves against leviathan in some ill conceived revolution. I'm sometimes disturbed by the martyrdom complex some Ancaps seem to exhibit; holing up with their favorite rifle and apparently just waiting for the JBTs to show up someday and take down as many with them as possible. Much safer to just pay otherwise worthless people to do the dirty work instead.

To wax poetic, the great melting pot of human society has got scum floating on the top, and scum settled on the bottom. It sure would be great if we could let them thin each other's ranks, with minimal bystanders getting plugged.

Then again, why count on the competence and boldness of American crooks? Watch the experiment unfold south of the border and see who takes the gamble. In parts of the world where life is cheap, AP might be a chief industry, and provide an excellent test pad for its 1st world conquest.

If there are other practical failures I have missed, I will have to address them in a follow up article. On to the alleged moral failures.

I do not think my audience will contest the notion that tax is theft, enforced regulation is aggression, and basically everything the government does, from bombing foreign kids, to propagandizing local kids, is wrong. Libertarian logic goes on to say that you have a basic right to defend your person and property from aggression, and that if a given level of force is insufficient to deter that aggression, you may justifiable escalate without bound until the aggression is so deterred. Furthermore, you are fully within your rights to contract out your defensive needs to other parties. If the aggressor you are facing is so overwhelming that you can neither personally defend yourself nor openly seek protection services, then it becomes necessary to devise clever systems like AP.

Still, some are concerned that indirectly paying someone to preemptively kill a politician is dangerously close to initiation of force, even if the institution he represents is admittedly oppressive.

First of all maybe you hate the state and have a T-shirt to prove it, but bear no ill will to the lowly 9-to-5er in the local bureaucracy with no real decision making power. Surely that misguided paper shuffler does not deserve to get axed along with the household name tyrants. Fear not, because AP only recognizes the power of the dollar, and unless someone, somewhere is willing to part with a small fortune in order to doom the government peon, he is probably just as safe as every other person listed in the phone book.

The stronger complaint is that no politicians deserve to die, and we should instead get the backing of legions of converts and politely present our leaders with one way tickets to somewhere far away and leave them be. If that were plausible, I'm all for it. Since its not, there's no reason to protest the forceful alternative.

I am not obsessed with justice or vengeance. I would be perfectly happy to let every reigning politician resign without further punishment, even those that knowingly ordered or caused innocent deaths. For example, I have no desire to expend energy exhuming FDR's corpse and dragging it around the town square, as my grandfather often insists should be done. In other words, out of sight, out of mind. The only thing that matters is that the rulers leave power, their offices dismantled. Going back to my earlier criteria, I will back whatever method of eviction is the quickest, cheapest, and safest (for me), regardless of the consequences said method brings down on the evictees. If AP is the Q, C, and S, then I shed no tears over however many leaders get snuffed before the rest discover their positions cannot protect them. If any of you have a soft spot for some politician who is "really an ok guy deep down, he just doesn't get it yet" then hopefully he will be among the first to 'get it' and work his damndest to disappear from public consciousness as fast as possible.

Imagine this scenario: You just went to considerable cost to move into a nice new neighborhood. The day after you move in, you receive the following note in the mail:

Your options are A) pissing away your down payment and leaving, only to find Vroman's relatives run similar scams in every other neighborhood B) coughing up the 2 grand every year, and futilely trying to convince your sheeple neighbors to petition Boss Vroman to leave you all alone C) killing a few thugs and eventually going down in a hail of lead, D) spend your 2 grand hiring someone to snipe Boss Vroman when he least expects it.

So which will it be, Ex-pat, LP, Waco, or...AP?

Whether you buy that as sufficient excuse or if instead, you buy into Bob Murphy's pacifism plan, is actually quite irrelevant. Here is the clutch argument. Why Ancaps should not oppose AP is that the fate of anarchism and AP are inextricably entwined. It is obvious that if the system works at all, it will be very profitable to the operators. In Ancapland there will be no law enforcement per se to crack down on a proposed AP operation. Thus it is inevitable that some profit-seeking anarchists, with no fear of state reprisal, will eventually start one or more AP servers.

No matter what route is taken to anarchism, peaceful evangelism or other, the end result will be a society devoid of central authority, and with an AP system in existence, due to simple profit motive.

Furthermore, even if the consequences of AP are a hell on earth comparable with the worst examples of grotesque statism, that is also irrelevant, because AP is unstoppable. Even if we all converted to minarchism so that we could have the benefits of pseudo-libertarianism, while still having a violence monopolist to counteract AP, that changes nothing. AP can destroy any state, minimal or monstrous. No matter what the ultimate outcome wrought by AP, there are no steps we can take that will avoid it. Even embracing the current police state, if that were a serious option, would not provide significant long term

resistance to the looming threat of AP. There is nothing short of 100% popular refusal to participate that will prevent AP from tearing down every political office in the world, and given human psychology, that 100% won't materialize.

Thus the only question is whether AP is useful enough for transition purposes that someone develops it now, or uses other methods to destroy statism first, and wait for AP to show up on its own.

It's like this. Person A is holding person B hostage at gunpoint. You, being a pacifist, would like to save person B, without killing bad guy A. Unfortunately for your humanitarian plans, person B is a part time ninja, and as soon as the immediate threat of the gun is gone, he is going to snap A's neck instantly. You also have a gun. So whether you shoot A yourself, or somehow non-lethally disarm him and unleash B's hands of death, A will die. Thus given the certainty of A's death (and deserved at that) the primary concern should be the other two people in the equation. If you attempt to disarm A, you could get shot, leaving B still trapped and you dead. Or you could just easily shoot A, saving both yourself and B, but troubling your conscience.

That's all I have to say about moral issues.

Lastly, there are the criticisms that claim that AP will successfully kill politicians, moral or not, but the real problem is that the system will result in something no better than the current regime. There are common cries that AP will get 'out of control'. I see two ways this could happen. Foremost is that the operators of AP will somehow appoint themselves de facto rulers in the resulting power vacuum and twist the tool to assassinate their personal enemies at will. This is clearly impossible because if they were able to operate their servers despite the pressure of a state, clearly someone else can operate a competing server despite the pressure of the rogue AP-ists, and if said rogues build themselves a personality cult in a bid for world domination, they make themselves ridiculously easy targets for AP v2.0.

The better reason this is impossible is because ideally the AP system would be so well designed that it would run autonomously, so as to avoid there being any actual operators for the state to arrest. Thus there are no operators to go bad in the post-state world either.

The other possible unintended consequence, opposite that of crypto-dictatorship, is the Randian fear about war of all against all, i.e. 'bad' anarchism ala Mad Max. I see little reason to worry about this possibility. If society degenerates to the point that putting a \$100 bet on someone dying tomorrow results in a very real possibility that you will be right, then this would imply that AP players are so widespread and killing so unremarkable, that you might as well just whack the person yourself and save the C-note. At this point, AP will fall into disuse for being an unnecessary middleman in the homicide business, except for those rare hard to find targets, as was its original purpose.

Therefore, AP has a feedback loop that prevents it from being practical as a means of facilitating petty murders.

In conclusion, AP is pragmatically sound, ethically justified, and strategically prudent. The only question is when. Watch out State, you're on a collision course with an extinction level event. I have foreseen it.

The Politics of Destruction

Robert P. Murphy

anti-state.com, July 11, 2002

For some time now, I have been aware of a widespread fascination among many libertarians with Jim Bell's "Assassination Politics" (AP). At my request, Robert Vroman has defended the merits of AP. In this article, I will argue that AP is just about the single worst idea that libertarians could advocate. Despite my misgivings, I thank Vroman for his article, so that AP sympathizers may be reassured that I am not attacking a strawman.

Now, before I get going, let me offer a serious note: It's true, as alluded to by Vroman's snide remark, that I have recently defended the merits of (qualified) pacifism. I realize that many libertarians find this stance hilarious and indicative of how much of a coward/wuss I personally must be. For the purposes of this debate, let me be clear: I am not at all relying on a pacifist philosophy, but merely the values held dear to most libertarians. I believe that one of the chief attractions of AP is that its proponents can sound like realpolitik tough guys; indeed, I think many people want AP to be practical. But such hopes must be put aside in a sober discussion over whether AP will in fact give libertarians the society they desire.

The Jim Bell System

For those readers who have never heard of Jim Bell's proposal, and because Vroman abstracted from details that Bell himself deemed essential, let me summarize the original AP vision: (In the following I draw on Parts 1 and 3 of the Bell article linked above, though I have taken some liberties in the interest of clarity.)

There would be two groups of people, the predictors and the patrons. The predictors would submit an untraceable (due to modern technology) "guess" to the AP administrators. The guess would contain an encrypted prediction of the exact date of the death of a certain individual. (The contents of the prediction would be unreadable, not only by the authorities but even by the AP administrators.) The patrons would send (untraceable and anonymous) digital cash donations specifying only the name of a certain individual.

The administrators would hold the donations and publicize the totals accumulated next to each person's name. Then, after a person on the list died, if anyone had sent in a correct prediction beforehand, he could send in the key needed to decrypt his original guess. The administrators would find that the key worked (i.e. the message would be unscrambled), and they would at that time see that the predictor had in fact correctly guessed the date of death of the deceased. The successful predictor would also specify the public key to be used to encrypt, as a digital cash payment, all of the accumulated donations associated with the now-deceased person.

The appeal of AP is obvious: It would ostensibly allow people to pool their money and finance assassinations of hated political figures. The use of modern encryption techniques would make such financing completely anonymous and risk-free. Because even the administrators would never know the identity of the assassins, there would apparently be no way for the government to crack down on the system.

Now, Vroman has defended AP on two major grounds: First, he claims that it is inevitable; whether we like it or not, AP is coming. Second, he claims that AP should be cheered by libertarians as the source of their salvation.

I dispute both claims. Despite the arguments of Bell and Vroman, I find the AP system completely impractical, and do not think anything like it will ever operate. (This is not to deny that modern encryption and e-currency trends will make traditional assassinations easier to finance. But this will not lead to a mass market in hits placed by the average consumer, which is the hallmark of AP.)

Moreover, I will argue that if AP could somehow be made to work, then it would spell the downfall of modern civilization. The libertarian dream of a free society, where people's property rights are respected, would be impossible in a world with AP.

Why AP Won't Work

Supply Side

Although the proponents of AP have done a good job defending it from perhaps the most immediate objections, nonetheless I find the proposal completely impractical. Now, I am no expert in the possibilities of anonymous digital cash payments, so I will concede for the sake of argument that this aspect of the system is as foolproof as Bell and Vroman believe. Even so, I think there are tremendous flaws that would prevent a workable AP system from arising.

My most fundamental practical objection is this: To the extent that AP works as advertised, then no one could possibly use it. That is, if it really were the case that the AP administrators could collect millions of dollars in donations, and funnel them to completely anonymous assassins, then what would prevent the administrators from simply pocketing the money?

After outlining his system, Bell asserts (in Part 3) that, "Potential future predictors are satisfied (in a mathematically provable fashion) that all previous successful predictors were paid their full rewards, in a manner that can't possibly be traced." But isn't this statement contradictory?

Suppose someone sends in a prediction, and takes out the target on the correct date. Then he sends in his claimant message (containing the key to unlock his encrypted guess), which is simply ignored by the AP administrators. Instead these unscrupulous organizers, who have previously flooded their own system with every possible prediction (and "paid themselves" the nominal fee for submitting each guess), act in whatever way is necessary to convince the public that they have paid off the assassin. In such a case, what is the cheated killer going to do? Complain to the police?

(The reason drug dealers can carry on despite the lack of courts and police is that purchasers can inspect the product they're buying. And whatever mechanisms the AP proponent comes up with to solve this problem – e.g. having a private, underground rating agency to which assassins can complain – what would prevent governments or other groups from registering phony complaints to discredit the system?)

It thus seems to me that the AP administrators themselves would need to be publicly known. Unlike Vroman's idea of a completely automated system, Bell recognizes this need. In an argument designed to prove that "ethical" AP organizations (i.e. ones that only target "deserving" people) would outcompete unethical ones, Bell says:

Since both organizations will accept donations for "deserving" victims, while only [the unethical one] will accept them for "just anybody," it is reasonable to conclude that [the latter's] rates...will be higher for its donations....In addition, [the ethical organization] will become larger, more credible, believable and trustworthy, and more potential "guessers"...will "work" its system, and for lower average potential payments. (Bell Part 6, bold added)

Now, to the extent that an AP system would require name-brand recognition to attract widespread donations, I think it is clear that governments could easily kill it in its infancy. It's possible that smaller systems could continually spring up after each set of administrators is tortured (much as the court rulings against Napster won't prevent teenagers from swapping songs), but the ostensible advantage of AP – the ability of hitmen to receive small contributions from millions of consumers – will never be realized.

Incidentally, Bell himself admits that the realization of AP would require martyrdom on the part of the initial administrators. I offer the following as proof (and to show just how poorly Bell understands American society):

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that EVERYONE would be identified. The "donors" to the system would remain perfectly anonymous, and the "guessers" would likewise be perfectly anonymous, but the organization itself would be made up of real people, who have published addresses, who have simply decided that they have had enough of the current system and are going to participate in a PERFECTLY LEGAL enterprise by the laws of the country, and just DARE the government to try to stop them....Suddenly, all the politicians would be put on the spot! Instead of being asked by the reporters for their position on the economy, pollution, the budget deficit, or some other thing, they'll ask, "Why should the public NOT want to see you dead?" (Bell Part 10, CAPS original)

One of the most immediate responses of the government to the rise of an AP system also proves that Vroman's idea of an automated administration is unfeasible. Imagine a credible AP system emerges, and the government can't stamp it out of existence. The first thing that would happen is high-level officials would disappear from public sight (perhaps implementing the "shadow government" plans originally designed to counter nuclear or other attacks on Washington). After they had done this, how would the public know when a particular politician actually died? Even if the politicians inside underground bunkers were still liable to hits from their colleagues, the government would simply lie about the official time of death. So any automated AP system would conclude that the "winning" prediction was, in fact, a losing one, since the computer would have no way of knowing the true date.

Demand Side

Simply put, I don't think Vroman or Bell realize just how nutty and horrible the AP idea seems to the average American. Especially if the government institutes a standing penalty of, say, a mandatory twenty-five years for placing an AP donation, I don't think we will have the millions of small donations that AP requires. The situation would be a prisoner's dilemma: No individual donation of \$10 or even \$100 is going to make the difference between a target being killed or not, and so there would be no reason for the average person to use AP. The fact that the donations could be made "safely" is not enough; the government would surely institute eavesdropping measures and would punish anyone who even visited AP sites.

As a final note on the impracticality of AP, let me ask, Why hasn't it happened yet? Bell was discussing the "inevitability" of his system back in 1996. The technology it requires is supposedly already here. So why haven't the heads started rolling?

Why AP, If it Worked, Would be Horrible

So far I have expressed serious doubts about the practicality of the AP system. But let's grant for the sake of argument that it could function the way Bell and Vroman believe. I contend that such an occurrence would be horrible from a libertarian perspective, and would, in fact, spell the downfall of Western civilization.

Most obvious, there is nothing in the AP system to restrict its targets to politicians or others "deserving" death. Think of the power the AP option would grant to labor unions (or the NAACP for that matter). Bell claims that his proposal "would make being an abusive government employee an extremely risky proposition. Chances are good that nobody above the level of county commissioner would even risk staying in office" (Bell Part 2). And by the same token, a functioning AP system would make being a

cost-cutting corporate executive an extremely risky proposition. Chances are good that nobody above the level of personnel manager would even risk holding his job. At the slightest inclination of a proposed layoff, the shareholders of the company in question would be snuffed out. Business would come to a standstill. To the extent that AP could make coercive government prohibitively costly, so too would it render the system of private property obsolete. (And again, whatever countermeasures the AP advocate proposes to protect private officials, could be used tenfold by government officials.)

Despite its claims, a functioning AP system wouldn't eliminate government. There are very few people in the world with the skill to execute, say, the Prime Minister of England. The "Mafiosos, Hell's Angels, Islamo-fascists, McVeigh acolytes, etc., plus a virtually bottomless supply of standard small time thugs and starving junkies," whom Vroman views as the vanguards of freedom, would be completely unable to penetrate the enhanced security surrounding federal officials in an AP-world, no matter how high the bounties. Rather than delivering us the heads of the masterminds of the New World Order, AP at best would pick off the mid-level bureaucrats.

(The proponent may point out the cliché that no one can stop an assassin who is willing to die. That may be, but if the AP hitman is killed, then the government will know who he is, and will have no qualms in arresting his entire family and circle of friends. So we see that a common claim for AP – that it will allow suicidal assassins to execute contracts and specify beneficiaries to receive the millions in bounties – is foolish.)

The response of Bell and Vroman to this objection (that AP won't be limited to the "bad guys") is typical of the flippancy with which they propose mass murder. Vroman says,

Fear not, because AP only recognizes the power of the dollar, and unless someone, somewhere is willing to part with a small fortune in order to doom the [relatively harmless] government peon, he is probably just as safe as every other person listed in the phone book.

In the first place, this is little consolation for the "government peon," since everyone in the phone book is only a point-and-click away from having a bounty on his head. But more serious, Vroman has here grossly misled the reader: The entire appeal of AP is that it doesn't require a "small fortune" from anyone; rather, it requires small donations from large numbers of disgruntled people. Presumably, hundreds of thousands of people would be willing to pay \$10 to see, say, Eminem or Barry Manilow removed from public service. If Vroman denies the profitability of these assassinations (or of the rude clerk at the local DMV), then he should stop claiming the profitability of hits on government personnel, who will spend millions and even billions of dollars to defend themselves.

(Keep in mind that the primary reasons a person can't currently take out a contract on, say, his boss after being fired is that (a) he wouldn't know where to go to hire a trustworthy hitman and (b) the police would know who had a likely motive and would probably be able to discover the identity of the assassin through interrogation. But if AP worked as advertised, someone could place, say, a \$5,000 bounty on a regular Joe's head, and a completely unrelated assassin – who has never even met the financier and is thus completely safe – could fulfill the contract. In the world of AP, people would be dropping like flies.)

In the same vein, Bell pooh-poohs the fear that his system could get out of hand. In an apparent demonstration of his intellectual honesty, Bell tells his reader of an initial worry that he later deemed illusory:

I thought, suppose a person used this system as part of a sophisticated extortion scheme, in which he sends an anonymous message to some rich character, saying something like "pay me a zillion dollars anonymously, or I put out a digital contract on you." For a while, this one had me stumped. Then, I

realized that an essential element in this whole play was missing: If this could be done ONCE, it could be done a dozen times. And the victim of such an extortion scheme has no assurance that it won't happen again, even if he pays off, so ironically he has no motivation to pay off the extortion....If making the payment can't guarantee to the target that the threat is removed, he has no reason to make the payment. And if the target has no reason to make the payment, the extortionist has no reason to make the threat! (Bell Part 6)

The visionary Bell has apparently not realized that this same game-theoretic reasoning "proves" why rich people are invulnerable to blackmail and kidnappers.

Ironically, the real reason AP should be anathema to libertarians is that its creation would be the best thing to happen to the government. Look at how much raw power the American people have granted the federal government since the 9/11 attacks. What Vroman and Bell fail to realize is that average people will not look kindly upon the assassinations of the "leaders" for whom they voted in the previous election!

The alleged virtues of AP would allow the government to do whatever it wanted. For example, Vroman believes the AP administrators would have an easier time than drug dealers, since there is no physical evidence. But by the very same token, it would be much easier to frame people on false charges of AP activity. The government could lock up anyone at all, and claim that it had "reliable" evidence of the suspect's "electronic terrorism." Civil liberties groups would demand to know what this evidence was, but the government would patiently explain that to reveal such information would compromise its ability to fight the clever AP computer whizzes. Anyone who thinks the public would object is a fool.

(Of course, the government wouldn't even need to lock up political enemies, and suffer the bother of criminal trials. It could simply take out a contract within the AP system itself.)

On this point, Vroman says:

But then what if the State, facing imminent destruction, lashes out blindly and tries to shut down the friggin internet? Or what if they establish martial law in the scariest uber-polizei-stadt since Adolf was dancing jigs? These and other Orwellian nightmares are possibilities. However, one must consider that any path to anarchism will eventually take us to a point to where the State is cornered and crazed, and thus this is not the fault of AP.

This is simply not true. Even overlooking the breezy dismissal of martial law, we see that Vroman completely misunderstands the role of public opinion in curbing the power of the State. The reason we have enhanced FBI powers this year, rather than last, is that the American people had the crap scared out of them by the 9/11 hijackers. And if AP ever started, the American public would be absolutely scared shitless and would grant the federal government unprecedented powers.

On the other hand, if we adopt the commonplace and admittedly humdrum tactic of persuasion, we can effect a bloodless revolution. The Soviet Union fell without the horrors Vroman claims are inevitable. We can do the same with the American federal government.

Conclusion

Libertarian anarchists must realize that the absence of a functioning government is not a sufficient condition for a free society. As critics are quick to point out, there are "lawless" areas in Colombia and Somalia that have no effective government. And if we look at human society before the rise of the State, we certainly do not see an exact model for the world we desire.

The only way to achieve a truly free society is to convince the vast majority that property rights must be respected with no exceptions. That is, people must realize that theft is theft, even when 51% endorse it. People must come to realize that murder is murder, even when duly elected “representatives” order it – or when thousands of people pay for it.

Any honest proponent must admit that even if AP works as advertised, it will take many years to completely kill off the State. In the meantime, we will have a generation who sees nothing unusual with assassinations of famous people – not just politicians but movie stars, businessmen, models, and anyone else envied or hated by the masses. Such a society could not possibly believe in the sanctity of property rights, or take seriously the non-aggression axiom.

I will close with an analysis of Vroman’s response to this objection:

If society degenerates to the point that putting a \$100 bet on someone dying tomorrow results in a very real possibility that you will be right, then this would imply that AP players are so widespread and killing so unremarkable, that you might as well just whack the person yourself and save the C-note. At this point, AP will fall into disuse for being an unnecessary middleman in the homicide business, except for those rare hard to find targets, as was its original purpose. Therefore, AP has a feedback loop that prevents it from being practical as a means of facilitating petty murders.

And by the same token, if we were to achieve anarchy by using nuclear devices to wipe out all the politicians (as well as millions of innocent people and modern civilization), then the survivors would find the further use of nuclear devices impractical.

Suicide Politics

Adam Young

anti-state.com, July 17, 2002

The recent debate between Robert Vroman and Bob Murphy regarding the morality and effectiveness of the Assassination Politics scheme got me thinking.

Assassinating rulers is not new, nor is the ideological defense of murder for political aims. And the "Assassination Politics" scheme to use political assassination as a widescale effort to turn the tables on the state and to terrorize it, has already been tried. Ambrose Bierce had that great quote in his Devil's Dictionary about abdication; that it was "an act whereby a sovereign attests his sense of the high temperature of the throne." Assassination Politics is presented as a workable scheme for abolishing the state by simply turning up the temperature on the state itself, and which wouldn't even require martyrdom for the assassin.

But is this the case? Does the history of political assassinations show us that as a method of liberation it has any positive results?

One of the most famous movements in history, and that gave its name as a synonym for short-sighted fanaticism, were the Zealots that opposed pagan Roman rule over Judea and in particular over the Jewish Holy City of Jerusalem. The Zealots organized resistance and carried out sporadic uprisings and attacks on Roman power. Some Zealots adopted the tactic of assassination and terrorism and were called the Sicarii – the Dagger Men – who murdered Romans, non-Roman foreigners and Jews who collaborated with the occupation. The Sicarii spread terror throughout Judea as the Zealots launched an uprising against Rome that initially seemed to be successful until under Vespasian and later his son Titus, Rome's Legions mercilessly reclaimed the land and leveled Jerusalem to the ground. The Jews were hounded

from their homeland and scattered all over the Mediterranean world. The Zealots used the tactics of the state to save their people and culture from Roman domination, and in the end, they lost nearly everything.

Assassination was also a favored tactic to dispatch Roman tyrants. In total, 31 Roman Emperors were murdered by poison, stabbing or strangulation. Not included in this number is perhaps the most famous political murder, that of Julius Caesar by Brutus and the other conspirators of the fading republican cause who called themselves the Liberators. This event is particularly instructive. The assassins murdered Caesar to save the Republic from his dictatorship. Unfortunately, Julius Caesar was very popular with the populace of Rome and they flocked to the leadership of his adopted heir, Octavian, who would go on to hunt down the assassins and eventually crush all opposition and end the period of Civil Wars. As the dictator in all but name, Octavian would adopt the quasi-divine status of Augustus and officially claim to have "Restored the Republic." The public's surrender to the military strongman who they believe is necessary to stave off chaos is a theme that returns again and again in history.

Besides the various judicial murders of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic and Restoration Eras, assassination as an ideological device would gain a wider use in the modern period. For instance, the duc de Berry, King Louis XVIII's nephew, was assassinated by a fanatical Bonapartist named Louis-Pierre Louvel who thought that killing the last Bourbon capable of producing an heir would extinguish the Royal line and bring about a Napoleonic restoration. The Cato Street Conspiracy in England was somewhat more coldblooded. Arthur Thistlewood and his gang initially plotted to blow up the Parliament building and everyone inside and declare a provisional republican government. This proving too impractical, he settled on merely killing the entire Cabinet with an assortment of guns, bombs and grenades. Thistlewood and 25 other men planned to storm the house where the Cabinet was meeting for dinner and butcher the inhabitants. The heads of the Foreign Minister and the Home Secretary were to be cut off and paraded on pikes through the streets. Unknown to Thistlewood, there was a spy in his organization and the plot was uncovered. Thistlewood and four others were hanged, five others were transported to the penal colonies of Australia.

Other assassination plots involved the "Citizen King" Louis-Philippe and Napoleon III. In the former, the would be assassin, Giuseppe Fieschi, a former thief and later a spy within the Bonapartist party for the Bourbon's secret police, invented a machine that could fire 25 rifles at once. In 1835, Fieschi and his allies fired this device at the passing King and his sons, missing them, but killing 18 bystanders, and wounding many more. Fieschi and the others were captured and guillotined. Instead of republican uprisings, the result was the regime tightened repression that silenced and drove the opposition underground for the next decade.

The would-be assassin of Napoleon III was Felice Orsini, an Italian nationalist, who thought that killing Louis-Napoleon would precipitate a general popular revolution in France that would spread to Italy to expel the various foreign regimes then ruling the divided peninsula. Orsini and his two accomplices bombed the carriage containing Napoleon and his wife, Eugenie, but both were unhurt, and the bombs instead killed several innocent bystanders. Orsini and his partners were captured and executed, too.

And this brings us to the period which has created so much trouble for those of us who describe ourselves as market anarchists today. Some anarchists of the Bakuninst and Kropotkin school adopted assassination and random terrorism as a tactic designed to expose the weakness of the state. This toll of murders, violence and destruction of property created the association of the anarchist in the public imagination and amongst the news media with the image of the mad bomber and the violent fanatic which has persisted to the present day. And it is this same image of the violent revolutionary that

motivates the rioters and looters who like to call themselves anarchists while arguing for tariffs, more welfare spending and higher taxes on gasoline.

Following the formulation given by the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta, of "propaganda of the deed" – that anarchist ideas could best be spread by armed insurrection – a wave of bombings and random terror and assassinations of rulers struck during the turn of the last century. Malatesta himself spent a total of twelve years in prison for his views, and was hounded by various regimes while in exile for nearly 30 years. Assassinations of ruling figures was designed to illustrate the vulnerability of the regime and inspire the public to rise up and overthrow the state. In this way, amid the other numerous assassinations of businessmen, priests and others, were the assassinations of high-ranking figures. These assassinations included several that are well-known, such as:

The fourth President of the Third French Republic, Sadi Carnot, was stabbed to death by the Italian anarchist Sante Caserio in 1894,

The Prime Minister of Spain, Antonio Canovas del Castillo, was shot dead in front of his wife by the Italian anarchist Angiolillo in 1897,

The neurotic Austro-Hungarian Empress Elizabeth was stabbed to death in Geneva by the Italian anarchist Luigi Luccheni in 1898,

The King of Italy, Umberto I, was assassinated by the Italian anarchist G. Bresci in 1900.

And President McKinley was shot on Sept. 6, 1901 by the Polish anarchist Leon Czolgosz.

It was because of this assassination that Congress passed repressive measures that barred anarchists from entering the United States – all immigrants had to publicly declare whether they were an anarchist or not – and foreign-born anarchists within the country were expelled. Anarchism during WWI was suppressed with prominent anarchists like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman and others either being deported or imprisoned.

The Japanese anarchist movement was wiped out after the discovery of their plot to assassinate the Emperor in 1911. Anarchists assassinated and murdered bankers, priests, land owners and factory managers and others during the Spanish Republic. The Spanish, Italian and German anarchist movements were exterminated by Franco, Mussolini and Hitler with broad national public support for their action against these bandits, thugs and murderers. After the success of the Bolshevik Revolution, anarchism was either swallowed up by the resurgent Communist movements around the world, or exterminated by Communist agents.

AP, if supported by market anarchists, or even defended by one of our own when others do it, can only lead to our being smeared with the same brush; as terrorists. Those of us who did not support the adoption of these tactics could see history repeat itself if AP became a common tactic by people calling themselves market anarchists or some variation, and we could turn off sympathetic interests who would then favor some more moderate, middle ground path. Market anarchism would be discredited and potential converts would be lost to the phony alternative of hope that the Republican party or the Buchananite movement's neoconservatism presents to statism. The state already shows contempt for property and life through its methods of random violence and murder, and imitating it won't advance the adoption of our ideas among the general public.

Not only do we have that to fear, but also the moral issue as well should concern us, namely the enticement AP presents to the worst elements of society to kill for sport and reward, which Vroman mentions with approval. As well, there is also the serious problem of what restitution is possible in a

system of anonymous assassination contracting as given by AP, in the case of the accidental killing of innocent bystanders...bystanders being a notable group of victims of anarchist assassinations in the past. As a group of people who regularly mention the state's carelessness with civilian life, or so-called "collateral damage," how on earth could we then shrug our shoulders at the accidental killing of innocent bystanders by one of our own? The carelessness and disregard for life shown by the AP system would steer us into the faults of statism, namely the pride and self-righteous disregard for property rights in the pursuit of "the greater good" and ultimately into a defense of "the ends justify the means."

The historian Paul Johnson, in his book *The Birth of the Modern*, described the effects of the sort of self-righteousness that followed in the wake of politicized murder:

"Perhaps the most significant characteristic of the dawning modern world... was the tendency to relate everything to politics. In Latin America, every would-be plunderer or ambitious bandit now called himself a 'liberator'; murderers killed for freedom, thieves stole for the people.... Organized crime now took on a party label and put forward a program and thereby became better organized and a more formidable threat to society. Thus violence acquired moral standing and the public was terrorized for its own good.... In the past, men with a grievance had suffered in silence or taken to the hills and robbed. Now the hitherto resigned joined secret societies, and the bandits called themselves politicians."

Another problem with the AP scenario is illustrated with the case of Sacco and Vanzetti, who were two Italian immigrants who were arrested for murders they didn't commit. Admitting that they were anarchists, they were convicted by the jury during the anti-anarchist craze of the period, and were executed, even though another man admitted he was the culprit. In an AP world, we would all be prey to false convictions and assassinations ourselves. As Bob Murphy pointed out, this system of assassination could easily spin out of control and could even be used by the state against known anarchists. The tactic of assassination would make it much easier for the state to harass, round up, detain, and even imprison known anarchists as a "danger to society." I don't think Vroman's disclaimer would carry much weight with the state on the warpath to preserve itself, and willing to do anything to do so. Anarchists would be demonized by the state and the media as the latest Greatest Menace that the United States and the American People have ever faced. Ideological murders took an incredible toll on the 20th century and on society. A culture of accepted and commonplace political murders would only coarsen and brutalize human relations further and provide the state with the excuse to preemptively murder American citizens. Also, I doubt that there is a shortage of men who would be willing to risk assassination for access to the vast resources for looting and protection that the state would offer. There is no shortage of drug lords, afterall.

Notwithstanding then all of the above, the main problem with AP is its philosophical failure: AP is terrorism. The entire system depends on random murder, with no attempt to gain the support of public opinion. Afterall, if assassinating political leaders was popular there would be little need, beyond fear of reprisals by relatives of the victim, for the anonymous bounties that is the hallmark of the AP system. The assassination of a particularly evil politician would send the people into the streets to celebrate and the assassin would be hailed as a hero and savior. Of course, we know this won't happen, because just as the American people, instead of blaming the state for 9/11, surrendered to its aggressions, the public doesn't have the proper knowledge to understand and place events in their proper context.

The dangers of providing ideological justification for assassination can be seen again from examples from history, which shows that the use of assassination has unforeseen consequences. Non-anarchists turned to assassination of political leaders to advance popular agendas. A few examples are the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1901 by the political terrorist organization, the People's Will; the

assassination of King Alexander I of Serbia by a Croatian nationalist in 1903, and of course the most destructive assassination in history, that of Franz Ferdinand and his wife by the Bosnian Serb, Gavrilo Princip, in 1914, which plunged Europe by its series of mutual defense treaties into the World War and the collapse of classical liberal Civilization.

All of these aforementioned anarchist assassinations, all these attempts to turn assassination into a political weapon to destroy the existing state establishment, had several things in common, but more important than this was their result: widespread public revulsion for the act and the perpetrators, sympathy for the victims and their families, and strengthening of the state's powers and renewed public support for the regime. Each terrorized state brought down new repressive measures. Moderation gave way to authoritarianism, just as we have witnessed in the post 9/11 era, as public opinion has deified the presidency and the state: the latest appearance of the military-backed strongman singlehandedly holding back the forces of chaos. One isolated assassination brought temporary sympathy to the state's rulers, but a continuous wave of assassinations as the AP model suggests could make that sympathy long-lasting and unleash a terrorized, and terrified, state determined to protect its privileges no matter how many of its people it must torture, imprison and kill. The historical response to anarchist assassinations were not popular uprisings, but draconian measures.

Looking back through history shows us that any state threatened by a movement to deny its authority to tax and rule, responds by lashing out. Abraham Lincoln terrorized Americans with the specter of secession devolving into Hobbesian 'anarchy' to justify his war. In the type of American society AP would bring about any appeal to the state to behave with moderation and to respect the rights of Americans would be overwhelmed by the state's claims of preventing crime and disorder. A state that sees its authority rebuked and attacked responds without accepting limits on what it can do. The approval for assassinations, torture, extra-judicial detention and military trials in the wake of 9/11 is only a hint of the powers a terrorized state would claim in its self-appointed role as defender of the people.

The public perhaps rallies to the state because they fear any force that is strong enough to destroy it, and thus fear the great power they don't know more than the evil they do know. AP if adopted could only make the people fear us and discredit our ideas, just as it happened to the older anarchist movement. Our best course of action would be to get the people to understand us and to understand the state. What makes us different from and better than the state is our ideas and our methods. By adopting the ideas and methods of the state – even to use against the state itself – would not be poetic justice, but the end of our own movement. In assassinating politicians, we would be committing suicide for ourselves and what we have to say.

Let's not lower ourselves to the level of politicians and the other bandits, looters and murderers. Let's not engage in the sort of gang warfare that would discredit our movement as being no different from the state. Let's not adopt the tactics of the state.

The Jim Bell System Revisited

Robert Vroman

anti-state.com, August 15, 2002

Let me re-emphasize that I have neither the knowledge nor the will to implement this system. I certainly don't like the State, but I would rather concentrate my energies on constructive rather than destructive solutions. That said, I still think governments everywhere are going to be staring down the barrel of an

encrypted gun in the near future, and this article attempts to explain why, in response to numerous objections received since my last article.

I also want to point out some areas where I think Jim Bell is completely off base. First of all, his insistence that AP [Assassination Politics] is somehow residing in a loophole of the American legal system that only he is aware of, is absurd, as rightly pointed out by many of his critics. I have no delusions that AP would somehow survive its “day in court” or that even if, due to some arcane technicality, AP is a legal enterprise that that would stop the State from pursuing it relentlessly. Furthermore, I am mystified by Bell’s fascination with confrontation and martyrdom (as exemplified by his personal life) and do not think AP will be started by the self-sacrificing, or that it’s even necessarily a good idea to have that mindset when designing the system. Bell also overestimates the enthusiasm that ordinary people will have for AP by a long shot. I still have reasons to believe there will sufficient customers, but they are not going to be primarily heartland regular Joes, who Bell envisions watching AP’s deadly progress with amusement. Bell also gives some slightly cockeyed responses to a number of objections to his invention. In fact really the main thing I take away from his writing is the system itself, not necessarily any of his justifications.

My friend and business partner, Bob Murphy presented some powerhouse arguments against my pet theory in our recent columnist debate over the infamous Assassination Politics concept. I contend that under closer examination, his insightful questions can be answered satisfactorily.

Additionally, Adam Young has presented a thoroughly researched historical analysis against AP, which I will address first.

Young has three main points. First, that assassination has been ineffectual in the past for destroying states. Second, assassinations will instead create a backlash against anarchism by government and citizens alike. Third, he does not like the moral implications of the very likely possibility of collateral damage from sloppy AP prize-hunters, given the relatively poor caliber of historical attempts.

The first point, despite all its exhaustive research, is I’m afraid to say, totally erroneous because the mechanism by which AP kills its victims is fundamentally different than assassination campaigns of the past. I am not at all surprised to read that a handful of suicidal ideologues gunning down a few unlucky aristocrats failed to exorcise the nation state. Assume for the moment that AP’s basic functions materialize (I will get to Murphy’s objections later). The pool of assassins has instantaneously expanded from only insane political extremists, to every single violent opportunist in the world who can access a computer. AP represents a veritable full scale war against the State, fought by the scum of society and funded by every partisan malcontent across the political spectrum. A dozen assassinations per century is certainly not going to give any politicians second thoughts about their career choice, any more than the dozen or so plane hijackings in the past 50 years makes me nervous seeing a turban in business class. However, logically speaking there must be some tipping point at which the body count is the most pressing statistic a politician has in mind. AP will surpass this tipping point, where history’s basket case revolutionaries were doomed to fail. The State will, of course, respond in nasty ways, but inevitably these will prove ineffective in the face of an impenetrable network supporting a sustained and widespread offensive.

Secondly, Young fears that AP will re-enforce the stereotype of anarchists as the 19th-century mad bomber and 20th century Starbucks arsonist. This will then erase any chance of our winning hearts and minds via soul-stirring online essays, and worst of all, get the lot of us gulagged.

What he fails to realize is the absolute lack of a reason for there to be any connection between anarchists and AP. If AP were actually launched, I for one would certainly not be publicly cheering it on (I probably

wouldn't even risk staying in the country, having written this article). The people who will be donating will not be doing so for anarchist reasons, they will not assume they are furthering anarchism, they will not make the connection. The targets also, will not probably be prioritized as an anarchist would. Ancaps are too small a group for our bets (if any) to be a major impact, thus if occasional bettors are caught, they are statistically unlikely to be one of us. The assassins will also not be Ancaps, unless any of you have a mercenary streak you're not revealing. If all goes well the admins will either not exist or remain anonymous, and thus their political angle is irrelevant.

With no anarchists predominantly involved in any of the core functions of AP, or visibly supporting it, I don't see why Young thinks that the State will blame anarchists for the rise of AP. In fact, if my predictions are correct, the assassins will primarily be the existing criminal class. If the State picks any scapegoats, it will be black militancy, or drug users, or the militia movement, etc, i.e. the people who are actually attacking them. The Government did not condemn anarchists for WTC, they blamed Islamic fundamentalists. Ancaps aren't being rounded up in detention camps, Arabs are. Despite the fact that anarchists have often said things in the aftermath that amount to "they had it coming to them." Which is more or less what I'm saying here. Anarchists will have just as much to do with AP as they did with WTC. The people who are going to suffer the brunt of the State's reaction are the actual instigators of violence, and if I read my audience correctly, that will not be any of you. Do you particularly care (aside from general aversion to Statist crusades) if the State launches a crusade against crack heads and professional killers?

If the non-betting population experiences revulsion from AP at work, its outrage will be directed at a disparate collection of political interests and unrelated thugs. The State will undoubtedly ramp up its enforcement regime in response to AP, however, there is no reason that anarchists would be singled out, when there are more direct threats available.

If the State does pick Anarcho-Capitalists as the source of all evil, instead of some other arbitrary group like, say the Republic of Ganjistan, then I advise us all to leave or prepare to be martyrs. At some point, things are going to get uncomfortable for non-statists whether it's Ashcroft Inc's regularly scheduled programming, or an AP frenzy whipped totalitarian drive. I plan to be an ex-pat at that time in either case. We can always come back in the aftermath, and start the equivalent of Awdal Roads Company in the former US of A.

The third is the issue of collateral damage, which can be creatively ameliorated within the AP protocol. Its conceivable AP players might get in the habit of waiting for a number of high priced targets to get in the same building, and then truck bombing the whole structure to claim multiple big prizes, without concern for the dozens of non-targets cut down along the way. The moral failure here, I believe, lies solely with the assassin. However, my opinion is irrelevant, because if the bettors themselves feel they are responsible and they have a conscience, they will not bet for fear that the target they put money on will take a hundred un-targeted coworkers down with him. Thus AP needs to alleviate the moral obstacles bettors will face in order to have the maximum revenue flow possible. The answer is to allow for pools to be started with any number of stipulations. For example, the prize for politician Z might include the following rule:

"If any bystanders are killed in the death of the target, 90% of the prize money will be donated to a fund for their next of kin. The remaining 10% will be distributed evenly to correct guessers via the normal method."

Or some such wording that would serve to greatly motivate the assassin to be careful in planning his attack.

By this scheme, there could be multiple prize pools for the same target, each with different disclaimers. For example, in addition to the 90% victim payout pool for Mr. Z, there might be a no questions asked pool for the same guy. Presumably, the fewer rules there are attached to the prize, the more likely an assassin will be to take a chance at winning it. Thus bettors have to balance their moral qualms about collateral damage versus their desire to see results. If they care more about bystanders, they should bet into the rules heavy pool, if they care more about eliminating the target, bet into the open ended pool.

Unless there is overwhelmingly more money in the “kill by any means” pool, the mere existence of the “kill carefully” pool, should convince the assassin to be as discrete as possible so as to win both prizes. So even if AP bettors are on the whole more bloodthirsty than socially conscious, the few with some scruples will be able to have a large impact on how AP players go about their operations. In fact if AP players really did tend toward wanton destruction in order to hit their marks, it might be in the best interest of people, who either exist in close proximity to a top target, or have a general compassion for bystanders, to bet into the constrained pool, even if they have no desire to see the target dead, but for no other reason than to be sure that when he does die, the assassin will hopefully be motivated by the money in the conditional pool and avoid civilian casualties.

Young denounces AP on the grounds that it uses a tactic of the State, i.e. “terror”, against the State itself, and this is a reprehensible flaw. Saying that AP is terror because it kills tyrants, is like saying shooting a mugger is terror. Well, yes. If you were unfortunate enough to live in a neighborhood inhabited by gangs, and got a reputation for shooting harassers without hesitation, this would effectively “terrorize” the gangsters into leaving you in peace, or so goes the “armed society is a polite society” school of thought.

However, AP does not even qualify as terror in the political sense.

The precise political science definition of terrorism is “a group that uses force against an intermediate target in order to bring about a desired decision from an ultimate target”. In other words, a terrorist is ill-equipped to directly attack the hated government, so instead he blows up a school bus, and issues a public ultimatum that unless the government meets some of his petty demands he will strike again. The logic being that the government is incapable of protecting every school bus all the time, and the terrorist has nothing else to do but plan his next bombing, so he can essentially strike at will. He hopes that eventually the State will tire of this harassment and acquiesce, usually because the population becomes exasperated at the government’s ineffectual attempts to stop the attacks, and it is in danger of losing its power, not due to any compassion for the school kids.

AP does not follow this model, primarily because, unlike the terrorist, it can indeed strike the ultimate targets directly and does not need to play deadly games with intermediate symbols. If anything, AP should be described as guerrilla warfare.

Even if the effects of AP end up being terrorist in the popular sense, this is wholly different from say Al Qaeda plotting together in some dusty bunker. AP is a decentralized system unlike anything ever before. Without a central decision making body like a terrorist cell, the targets selected by the AP patronizing public will reflect its user’s ideologies. AP will only use explicitly terrorist tactics, if its users overwhelmingly have terrorist inclinations themselves, which given the superior abilities provided by AP, is an unproductive course of action and a waste of money.

I hope that is a decent response to Young’s excellent article. On to Mr. Murphy’s piece.

First Murphy doubts the feasibility of AP with the very legitimate concern that if the system were truly an impenetrable secret to all investigators, there is nothing stopping the AP operators from pocketing all

the donations, yet claiming winners had been paid, resting on the impossibility of discovery, and the robbed winner's desire to remain anonymous (since he's probably got blood on his hands). A better scam might involve creating artificially high bounties, and then only paying out what's actually in the pot. Since if there are multiple bets on the same day, the prize is split evenly between them, the assassin will not know if he has been cheated or if there are actually were enough other random guessers to dilute his prize down to the share he actually gets. The administrators could also skim off a healthy chunk too, and no one would be the wiser. This would probably be the best way to for the admins to dishonestly game the system, so that they enrich themselves; the assassins are disappointed but not given proof of treachery; and the bounties are higher than normal, thus enticing more gullible thugs.

So is this really a problem? Seems to me the system still works exactly as planned whether the admins are honest or not. The only problem is getting people to trust the system in the first place, which I'll cover in a minute.

If we assume that the admins' purpose in creating AP is to make as fat a profit as possible, then they will not want to blatantly rip off hitmen, for fear that word will inevitably get out among the criminal population that AP isn't on the level. However, even in an extreme case where the admins do embezzle every penny, it doesn't matter. Since very few people involved with AP will be actually killing anyone, only a tiny minority of users will feel they have been cheated, while the greater number will be convinced they got their money's worth. Thus they will continue to use the system. Future assassins not in communication with their gypped colleagues will also be led to believe others have been paid. Thus everything still works, money goes in, prizes are accumulated, and targets are eliminated.

If the admins really are capable of hiding all evidence and expertly conning the system, then the system will indeed be conned, and so well conned, that it will continue to run despite being conned over and over. The only problem is if this possibility prevents people from ever starting to bet and becoming convinced they are being dealt with fairly.

There are two answers to this: the AP business can slowly build trust with less extreme versions of itself, and also the overlooked fact that people have a surprisingly high tolerance for potentially fraudulent online services.

To establish itself as an authentic operation, AP might be introduced not as a full fledged death machine but instead as a low key betting pool system whereby users could put money on sporting events or guess the day certain celebrities will get divorced, and other trivial wagers. The selling point is the hardcore anonymity feature for users in harsher nanny states. In this relatively low risk phase, winners could have the option of being publicly announced for ego's sake, and this would prove the system operated as intended. Then gradually more and more sinister bets would be allowed until it becomes completely unmoderated and AP is born.

Such a system would not be nipped in the bud, as Murphy predicts, as there are countless underground betting organizations currently in operation, and proto-AP would arguably be even more secure from law enforcement, by benefit of its exclusive existence on the internet with solid encryption and no face to face contact among users. Even at the intermediate semi-morbid phases its possible proto-AP would not garner significant government attention. Look at this <http://www.stiffs.com>.

Clearly harmless, but the fact it has garnered no legal complaints is a good indicator that real-AP would be able to go on the offensive for some time before the Feds figured out where the threat is coming from.

I also still think the best idea is to design an autonomous system with no publicly identified administrators even in the proto phase, whether this will become feasible with future developments in cryptography remains to be seen.

Even if AP did not go to the trouble of gradually building a customer base, it does not necessarily mean it will fail. Examine the case of online gambling. Here we have people putting their money on games where the “house” can completely manipulate the odds in its own favor simply by changing a few lines of code, and the user will never know unless he takes detailed notes on winning percentages. They do not even have a reputation at stake like a traditional Las Vegas casino, which could do the same with its electronic slot machines. If a Vegas outfit says its slots payout 99% or something, people who have no good reason to trust that, still play by the thousands. Many people are unaware that the Nevada Gaming Commission even exists, and virtually none have any idea how good a job they do at enforcing gambling regulations. And inexplicably they play online versions of these same dubious games too, where they have far less control, and nowhere near the trust of a “reputable” brick and mortar casino. Online gambling rakes in millions, despite obvious security holes and opportunities for abuse. An indicator that even if AP is not foolproof as far as protecting bettor’s money from the admins, people will still donate and predict. Maybe they’re just stupid, and maybe the online casinos are actually honest.

Murphy also points out that if politicians resort to holding Congress inside a NORAD bunker, then any information about deaths inside the mountain can be easily manipulated by the government, thus disrupting the rewarding of correct guessers. I doubt this will be an effective countermeasure against AP. If the outside world never knows that the Feds are lying about death dates, then potential assassins would not be aware their successful hits might be in vain. They would then still have the motivation to mount their attacks, and only afterward realize the government’s press corps has cheated them out of their prize. However, the people donating money have still gotten what they want: a dead politician, and thus will continue donating. Since the assassin will presumably either be dead, captured or in hiding, he will not be able to warn anyone that the government is using information warfare against AP. Thus the system continues as planned.

On the other hand, if it becomes common knowledge that the government is not a reliable source of information, then it will be up to the assassin to make the real death date known. Perhaps acquiring a tissue sample from the victim and anonymously forwarding to independent media, or videotaping the kill shot with some kind of provable date stamp. This means the assassin has to take extra risk in getting close enough to the body to grab some proof, or accidentally providing incriminating evidence on tape, and also risk further exposure in contacting the media. If the AP server is run autonomously, it will have to be programmed to take into account the relative trustworthiness of misinforming government sources versus potentially nutcase indy media, and then make a decision as to the actual date of death. If the information is too ambiguous, then it might extend prize percentages to predictions on neighboring days, based on the probability of being correct. In light of this possibility, the assassin would be smart to take out high interest loans and dump his entire net worth into bets on days all around the planned kill date.

In light of this development, the assassin will have to take more risks and thus insist on a higher prize before taking his chances. Thus this government strategy will only serve to increase the equilibrium price of assassinations, just like their moving into the bunker itself.

Matt Apple brought up a similar potential scam on the forum:

“Another problem is the targets could fake their deaths. Suppose I’m a powerful person you’ve targeted. I just buy a day and then fake my death on that day. I put out a phony death certificate, maybe I even provide some gruesome staged photos of me lying dead. The media reports me dead and the operator

releases the dough to the “guesser” ie me. As soon as the anonymous transaction is completed I appear on camera at a live press conference and announce that the plans of the evil electronic terrorists have been foiled and that in an ironic twist I’m donating the bounty they had on my head to the FBI. If this happened just once then all the people pumping up those bounties will lose their faith in the system.”

If the media is so blatantly lied to, then more so than the AP bettors, the media itself will not believe future death reports. They will want to take pictures at the autopsy or do whatever it takes to have ironclad proof that this guy really is dead. If the media becomes an overt tool of the state, there will still be people who demand an objective news source, whether they are AP sympathizers or not. This demand will support the Matt Drudges of the world who will find a way around mainstream hegemony, and AP can be programmed to ignore statist media.

Murphy doubts that my army of gutter trash will be able to make a dent in the ruling class. Perhaps he’s right that the average street hoodlum will only be successful in killing mid level bureaucrats that the State can’t afford to lavish security on. However, if that were true, is it really such a crucial flaw? If AP bettors come to realize that the tiptop of the pyramid can find impenetrable missile silos to hide in, then it’s no longer cost-effective to chase them with ever higher donations. Like any institution, the State clearly needs support personnel, and even if they do choose to hide in Mt. Cheyenne, they still need people on the ground at the very least to crack heads and collect taxes to keep the lights on down in their hole. If AP bettors become frustrated that the juicy targets are out of range, the next level down is going to take the brunt of it in the face. It might be fun to be a stormtrooper, but if suddenly you, due to lack of options, become the priority target for the assassination market, maybe its time to turn in your badge and go back to a vocational school. Additionally if you are an ordinary citizen who has up to this time not been involved with AP at all, but suddenly you notice that the tax collectors who stay above ground are getting executed with alarming frequency, you might be more inclined to gamble on fudging your returns or not paying at all, and hoping that the constant harassment provided by AP will prevent the revenue harvesters from noticing you.

If the State is denuded of its agents and means of interaction, then it is just as harmless as if it had been chopped up directly.

However, it would naturally be more efficient to strike the root. AP would reach its end goal quickest, with the least collateral damage, if assassins were able to hit the politicians even in their super-bunkers. There’s an argument that there is some upper bound beyond which additional funds will no longer influence the odds of an assassination taking place. Meaning that if \$500M is not enough to convince anyone to take a chance on the target, \$5B probably won’t either. That may be the case for individuals, but not for groups of AP players. If a mercenary or terrorist group became interested in mounting a multi-person operation like the WTC attack, then the higher the bounty gets, the more equipment they can buy and more personnel they can recruit for the plan. If say, there were multi-million dollar bounties on Saddam Hussein (a safe example) and all his top generals and lieutenants, making their bunker a concentrated mega bounty, it could become worthwhile for some para-military unit to risk a raid. The highest paid professional mercenaries in the world are employed by Sandline International and, according to the UN (who wants to ban their line of work), they make no more than \$300,000/yr. That’s not chump change, but for someone who rides shotgun in a chopper chasing down African guerrillas for a living, the extra risk driving into Baghdad might be worth the hazard pay offered by AP.

Taken to its logical conclusion, if there were enough extremely high bounties on a country’s leaders, who were all clustered into one spot, no matter how well defended, it could be cost-effective for army sized forces to be mobilized to seize the prize. So even if the top brass did hole up in the ultra bunkers,

entire legions of militiamen or other adventurous chaps might come a-knocking to snag all those billions.

Murphy goes on to say that the average Americans will be horrified by the idea of AP. True, the 50% of the population who don't bother to vote probably will not feel their time is well spent influencing the political system by AP or any other method. Of the other half, probably the majority has no deep interest in the issues or understands anything beyond doing one's civic duty. Of that slim percentage that actually has strong to passionate views, whatever they may be, therein lies AP's demographic. What Bob fails to realize is that AP bettors will not know what they are doing, long term. Very few people are going to consciously decide they want to get rid of government and put money on it. Instead, they will donate money against specific politicians in the hope it will help advance whatever pet cause they clutch so dearly. Think if AP were in place back in the 2000 election. Are you a greenie who can't stand the thought of oilman GW raping poor Gaia? Give AP some of your weed money and see what happens. Are you a good ol' boy who thinks eco-feminist Al Gore will send the beloved US of A the way of the Roman Empire? Put off buying that new truck and see what AP can do. Even the most authoritarian bastard who ever cast a ballot can list some Statists of a slightly different breed than rub him the wrong way. Do you doubt the gun culture would pass up on an opportunity to bury some liberals, or for the religious right hypocrites to take out some of the godless queers in Washington, or radical feminists putting their 79 cents on the dollar against Deep South carpetbaggers? And more importantly than private citizens, don't forget corporate-statists, like Big Ass Subsidies Inc who's pocket politician might lose to the candidate who's platform calls to spend the loot on some other boondoggle. Surely they can afford a million dollar write off if their spot in line at the trough is at risk.

The point is that maybe Mrs. Soccer Mom has no strong opinions and would never think of placing a bet, but there are many, many people with strong political views, regardless of what they are. Surely the more diehard or less moral will see that they increase the chances of their guy winning, if the enemy is scared off by a rising AP tab.

And the boiling frog effect comes into play as AP makes its mark on the world. When the state predictably increases its enforcement measures, more people will see it in their best interest to bet against encroaching fascists.

If you doubt Americans will buy into this system in relevant numbers, I will repeat the point from my first article that Murphy did not address. I can concede that Americans will refuse to play, or that the Feds will manage to protect themselves (I don't) but that does not mean AP cannot be effective. Ignore the NATO countries for a minute. Imagine AP taking root in some exotic locale like Nigeria for example. I bet a lot of those relatively well to do white farmers might take the opportunity to go online and put some money against Mugabe. I also think that one of his sadistic henchmen might be able to do the math to see that the AP prize is greater than his entire combined future earnings. The downside of the Third World is the lack of communications infrastructure, but in the coming years, ever cheaper electronics will make that less and less of an obstacle. The upside, of course, is that the leaders are rather absurdly unashamed of their predations, and very frequently there are large contingents of people who adamantly hate them. Furthermore add that these States have less sophisticated means of combating online activity it disproves of, and the fact that the population is used to politicians forcefully attempting to grab the throne. The conclusion is that many of the potential objections that apply to America and the "civilized" world are not to be found at all south of the equator. This could be an interesting testbed for the protocol. If it works, we get another blossoming Somalia. If it fails, well, the country was a hellhole before anyway.

Murphy says that if AP works well enough to destroy the state, it won't stop there and will completely shred civilization.

He claims for example that just as disgruntled citizens can axe politicians at will, laid-off workers can axe their cost cutting former employers and that any defenses the private individuals can use, will be even easier for the state to use.

This is wrong on both counts. Not only is it harder for capitalists to be killed, they can defend themselves from AP easier.

First of all, there are vastly more high ranking business owners than there are high ranking bureaucrats. If the AP betting population suddenly gained an all consuming irrational desire to destroy capitalism, it would take a far greater monetary investment against businessmen than politicians, to reach that tipping point where targets are scared away from their positions.

Furthermore, each individual businessman has a much smaller pool of people affected by his decisions. Whereas everyone in the country has to deal with the onerous decrees of the gang in Washington, there are many orders of magnitude fewer people dependent on any given board of directors. Presumably, people who don't work for that company will not be very inclined to donate money, just as not many Americans would bet against Italian party chiefs. Therefore if the boss does manage to royally piss off the workers, he has much fewer potential bettors against him. These are people who have just lost their source of income (with no welfare to look forward to), and have fewer co-conspirators; they will not be able to produce nearly as enticing bounties as those that public officials will accrue. Keep in mind that people who bet against politicians will be expecting their incomes to rise in the absence of taxes, and thus be more likely to bet higher.

More importantly, the boss knows who they are. If murder is being considered it's likely due to them being whipped into a fury by some mafia goon union boss. The CEO has much more money at his disposal than an unemployed working class gang. If the union leader agitates his followers to wreak AP based revenge against the CEO, he can't expect to survive either. Anyone who attempts to rally workers to donate their already dwindling cash reserves into pointless vengeance will see his own name rising on the list faster than the CEO's. The population of an entire state will be large enough that the number of independent people willing to put money against their powerful enemies will not require there be anyone egging them on. In order for smaller interest groups to get their petty revenge, a more coordinated effort is required. Harder still is that the potential victims have a much more conveniently sized body of suspects to watch, compared to politicians who are being targeted by anonymous bettors hiding among millions or billions.

And better still, if the CEO knows whom he fired and who is threatening him, then everyone else knows as well. Would you hire workers who had paid for the assassination of their last employer? If a group of people are fired and their ex-boss is subsequently the target of a fat AP prize, then the entire group will immediately be blacklisted by every other employer. This will provide a huge incentive for individual workers not to toe the union line. Their own reputation and future employability rests on breaking their professional relations civilly or at least without bloodshed.

This situation might instead just serve to impress upon corporations the need to be more careful in their hiring and firing. Only take on workers you really need, and only let them go after careful consideration, and in that event, possibly firing them in smaller batches, rather than mass layoffs. Nevertheless, this may indeed grant more power to workers. We must remember that not all corporations are nobly building wealth in spite of government machinations. Occasionally there really are scumbags who abuse employees, is it such a disaster if such people fear lethal retaliation for their misdeeds?

Another dystopian fear is that AP will support murders between non-famous people over petty frustrations. A scumbag husband wants to get out of a divorce without losing half his wealth, so if he thinks an AP bet worth a quarter of his wealth will get the job done, and does so. An unrelated party kills the wife, scumbag cuts his losses nicely, and the wife is horrendously aggressed against with no chance of justice for her family.

Yes, this is a problem that AP would exacerbate. Choosing your spouse carefully has always been good advice. However, if the wife's lawyers checked the AP records and found there had been a substantial prize, despite her being a generally well liked individual, they would decide that the "unrelated" killer might not be such a random tragedy after all. And proceed to hire detectives to investigate the ex-husband's financial records to find a similarly sized hole. Even if he expertly hid all his transactions with encryption and such, the sheer lack of other suspects may lead an arbitration committee to demand the husband prove his innocence. I assume hiring an assassin to initiate aggression will be a crime in Ancapland, but I will let others debate that.

Like the threatened businessman who knows who his potential threats are, in the case of an innocuous unknown being the victim of AP, it will be easy to discover the few or single person that has the motivation to invest the significant money involved. AP, in fact, hurts the chances of the anonymous petty murderer, because the record of one's prize is public. Anyone who cares to investigate the death of an AP victim can see exactly how much it cost. If the victim had few enemies, it is a simple matter to make the connection between the specific sum and the likely suspects.

Compare this to the case of a low level bureaucrat that Murphy complains is just as vulnerable as the rest of us. He is right in saying that it doesn't require one big bet, only lots of little bets. However, unless the bureaucrat has managed to piss off all those people placing the little bets, they won't happen, and he is safe. If the bureaucrat has managed to do so then there's probably a reason he deserves it. People in the phone book though, probably do not have multitudes of enemies, and thus are safe from all but an exceptionally wealthy psychopath, which I imagine are few and far between.

As for the extortion scheme that Jim Bell rather awkwardly argued against and Bob accurately deflated. The problem there is that the extortionist needs to have enough money of his own to actually place the bet that will attract assassins to his victim.

Fortunately, extortionists usually ply their trade because they don't have any money. The thug could bluff, but if called on it, he has no bargaining chips in this case, like an old fashioned significant other duct-taped in the basement.

If he actually does have the money and the victim calls his bluff, if he goes through with his threat, he has just spent a shit load of money to kill someone for no reason, and with no return benefit to the extortionist. Not a very profitable scam.

If he does convince the target to play along, he still has to communicate his threat. Such exchanges usually involve some amount of negotiation, or complicated instructions that require communication. The extortionist has to sacrifice a lot of anonymity to pull his crime off. This weakness gives the presumably deep pocketed target plenty of opportunities to spend some of that ransom on private detectives to locate the extortionist. The criminal, in this case, has no human shields to prevent a raid.

The benefit of AP is to allow anonymous assassination contracts, in both the case of the vengeful labor leader, and the crafty extortionist, both lose that shield and leave themselves wide open to retaliation from the greater resources of their chosen enemies.

Another concern mentioned on the forum, is that the State, with its trillions of revenue will actually invest money into AP to off its political opponents. This is a pretty ridiculous proposal.

First of all, the enemies of your enemies are not necessarily your friends. If the State pays an AP assassin to shoot some, say, ultra-lefty criticizing them, are we really that much worse off? In fact, I'd be overjoyed to see politicians taking out AP bets against their opponents for the most part. Why should a democrat spend valuable campaign money on advertising when he could just pay to have his republican opponent drop out of the race permanently? Libertarians are rare enough that I doubt we present a serious enough threat to the State compared to their fellow parasites scrambling for the best suck spot, that they'd spend money to attack Harry Browne instead of their opponent in the primary who has a real chance of ousting them.

Another problem with this supposed counter strategy is that it's entirely unnecessary. If the State really wants to kill someone, they already have all the tools; they don't need to spend money on AP. They could just give Lon Horiuchi his normal paycheck and have him snipe whoever they don't like. It's not as if they ever get in trouble for it, even when they aren't exactly subtle. It doesn't make sense for them to pay for secrecy they don't need.

Finally, this plan would backfire, because if the admins are anarchists, and they take a commission, then the State, by playing AP, is directly enriching someone who will re-invest his profit against State targets. Also, the assassins don't care who they kill if the money's right. The State is also enriching people who will be just as happy to come back and shoot Statists, now with more resources to plan hits too.

Bob concluded by essentially saying that the only way to anarchy is an enormous campaign of rational evangelism. He disapproves of the whirlwind anarchy in Somalia and similar power vacuums. I disagree. I see much more hope for building Ancapland out of the lawless ashes of a Somalia, than of gradually subliming the promised land out of the monolithic State in an America. If AP does prove the alarmists right, and crashes society into an apocalyptic period, (I do not think this is the case) still, such a turn of events will be in the long run an easier path to Ancapism than the intellectual erosion strategy. Murphy points out the example of the bloodless revolutions in Eastern Europe. To which I respond derisively, what revolution? They traded hard-line Russki-communism for soft line Euro-socialism. That's even more of a joke than American style Republicrat lesser-evilism. Stasi agents all retired on embezzled millions, and now the Great Terror War is inviting domestic espionage back in force all across the Continent. The only revolution that arguably has ever made recognizable progress is the American experiment, which is notable for killing employees of the previous regime by the thousand. If Thomas Jefferson could have emailed digicash to pub brawlers in London, or scheming heirs in Buckingham palace, mad King George's confused reign would have come to a deserved end before he could futilely attempt to reclaim his rebellious colonies. The point being, in order to get anarchism, I don't think it's a question of getting the balls to start sledge hammering the Berlin Wall and hope the Kalishnikov toting border guard respects the numbers presented by all your fellow civil disobeyers. If the only fall out is a different set of thugs being in charge tomorrow, there will, of course, be less State resistance than if the entire thug industry is being called into question. If you want real change as in no more thugs, ever, then the top thugs aren't going to budge until they have no other choice. The ultimate conclusion then is that if anarchism takes a revolution of the non-bloodless variety, there's no reason why the fighters shouldn't be backed up by a means to get at the higher ups. Or better yet, replace the fighters entirely with anonymous assassins and strike exclusively at the heights of power. I know I don't want to spend much time huddling in trenches.

It undoubtedly sounds arrogant, but I would say that less than 1% of the global population has any concept of how the world (i.e. economics) really works, and of those that do, most have got it horribly wrong. However, when they are forced to suddenly make do for themselves in the absence of authority, as is the case of Somalia, Anarchism spontaneously appears without the presence of wise graduate student mentors preaching Mises. It sure would be nice, naturally, if Bob could go over and warn them off from accepting UN overtures of providing “stable governance”, but the point is they were able to find profitable anarchism on their own, with little to no knowledge of economics and certainly no deep respect for pacifism. All it took was the total destruction of their state, the means notwithstanding. On the other hand, if Murphy expects to get some percentage of the population to side with him before picking up a hammer, he will definitely be taking the long uphill route.

Murphy says that a generation growing up surrounded by headlines full of dead famous people will be disastrous. I fail to see how this could be more damaging than the scores of generations stretching back into history that grew up with headlines of how great the State is. The Somalians lived through generations of war, where life was made quite cheap, yet now they are Africa’s best chance.

If AP worked perfectly and stripped the state away by force in a relatively short time frame, people will be thrust into unfamiliar territory. No doubt in their confusion they will attempt to recreate State functions. These will be torn down again and again. Like a child getting its hand slapped every time it reaches for the hot stove, AP will discipline the world that concentrations of power are bad. In the meantime, if Murphy is able to patiently explain to the bewildered why this is the case, so much the better, but either way, there will be no more State, and they will not have a choice in the matter. Murphy is essentially advocating a Taking Children Seriously approach to enlightening the collectively childlike population. I would rather just smack them until they stop and maybe explain briefly afterward why.

Lastly, it seems clear to me that AP is superior because it is a market process. People exchange value for perceived value. They invest their money for the benefit of removing aggressive people from society. On the other hand, Murphy is advocating an “educate the masses” routine that depends solely on him and his colleague’s dedication to the cause. Not to disparage his efforts, honestly, if anyone can do it, the current crop of anarchist intellectuals has got my fullest confidence. However, I really don’t think anyone is going to listen until they are already living in it. I see the economic wizard’s role as after the fact guides in the new wonderful world of anarchism wrought by AP and other market strategies. Once everyone is stuck in their regional equivalents of Somalia, and wondering what the hell just happened, Bob and co, will step in and say, “Hey, isn’t this great, look how much more we can get done now!”

And people, who have been forced to find alternatives to formerly government offered services, and no longer obey regulations or sacrifice taxable income, will sit up and finally notice Bob, and say, “What the fuck? Why haven’t we always done this? Thanks, Bob!”

Bob will then smile knowingly and go on a world wide lecture tour.

Then from time to time, a few clueless bastards will try to “get all the guns and take over”. AP will mercilessly smite them. Life goes on. In the meantime, I await the next round of objections.

The Politics of Destruction, Part Deux

Robert P. Murphy

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In his latest article, Robert Vroman has defended his original praise for the Jim Bell system, or "assassination politics" (AP). Briefly, the system works like this: People place encrypted "guesses" on the date of a certain person's death. If and when the person dies, the accumulated funds for this person will be evenly divided among all those who correctly predicted the date beforehand, and will be disbursed to them in the form of untraceable digital cash. Because this decentralized mechanism cleverly allows millions of disgruntled citizens to funnel anonymous donations to the person who correctly "guesses" a politician's date of death, Vroman and other anarchists have seized upon 's idea as a practical way to destroy the State within our lifetimes.

In my last article, I argued that AP could not work as advertised. To the extent that its infrastructure were truly invulnerable to government counterattacks, then for that very reason would-be assassins could not verify that the AP bounties were in fact paid after a successful hit. Further, I argued that even if AP worked in the way Vroman believes, it would not eliminate government. The government would take appropriate countermeasures, and during the ensuing chaos would assume unprecedented powers. (If the 9/11 attacks scared the American people into accepting troops in airports, imagine the draconian measures they would clamor for after the assassination of, say, a dozen senators.) I concluded by pointing out that a free society requires not only the absence of government, but also the widespread respect for property rights. A libertarian society could not possibly develop in a world where anyone hated by the masses – not only politicians but also movie stars and CEOs – would be quickly eliminated.

I stand behind these objections, and will not add to them in this article. Instead I'll focus on Vroman's responses to these arguments, and point out the several places in which he contradicts himself.

* * *

Vroman first addresses Adam Young's observations on the bad reputation anarchists have historically achieved through the use of terrorism:

With no anarchists predominantly involved in any of the core functions of AP, or visibly supporting it, I don't see why Young thinks that the State will blame anarchists for the rise of AP. In fact, if my predictions are correct, the assassins will primarily be the existing criminal class. If the State picks any scapegoats, it will be black militancy, or drug users, or the militia movement, etc., i.e. the people who are actually attacking them. The government did not condemn anarchists for the WTC, they blamed Islamic fundamentalists. An-caps aren't being rounded up in detention camps, Arabs are....Anarchists will have as much to do with AP as they did with the WTC. The people who are going to suffer the brunt of the State's reaction are the actual instigators of violence, and if I read my audience correctly, that will not be any of you. Do you particularly care (aside from general aversion to Statist crusades) if the State launches a crusade against crack heads and professional killers?

I think this quotation beautifully illustrates Vroman's gross misunderstanding of State power. First, note that Vroman thinks the people who will suffer from the federal government's response to 9/11 are the "actual instigators of violence." I don't think the Afghan civilians killed by bombs instigated the WTC. I don't think the Taliban and Saddam Hussein were directly involved in the WTC. And I don't think the American citizens, who have lost a great deal of their liberty since 9/11, were the actual instigators of violence.

Second, Vroman's assertion that "we're" not in danger, only those wacky Arabs, I frankly find shocking. I expect this sort of reassurance from National Review conservatives, not from someone who supposedly understands how the government has grown into its present size. In any event, once it is American citizens who start assassinating political leaders, you can bet that being white will not be enough to guarantee your freedom.

Finally, in response to Vroman's rhetorical question, yes, I am totally opposed to a State crusade against crackheads. I thought all libertarians considered the Drug War to be one of the worst features of our society, but apparently it doesn't bother Vroman.

Of course, this is being unfair to Vroman. He surely understands the harm that the Drug War has caused, not only to those jailed, but also to the truly innocent third parties, victimized by rampant gang warfare and eroded liberties. If the public will tolerate the excesses of drug prohibition in order to save potential addicts from themselves, imagine what the public will tolerate in order to save their beloved leaders from being murdered.

Before moving on, let me make one more comment concerning the Drug War: Does Vroman believe that in the interim period, after AP has been introduced but before we have reached anarchy, the government (in conjunction with conservative civilians) could fight drug dealers more effectively by using AP? In other words, could the drug trade be shut down with AP the way that the State apparatus could be? I imagine Vroman would say no, that there will always be people willing to deal drugs (and earn millions) despite the rising probability of death. I would agree with this, and would only add that a fortiori there will always be people willing to assume control of the State, no matter how hazardous such an occupation becomes.

Returning to Vroman: After conceding that things could get quite ugly after the introduction of AP, he goes on to say:

At some point things are going to get uncomfortable for non-statists whether it's Ashcroft Inc.'s regular scheduled programming, or an AP frenzy whipped totalitarian drive. I plan to be an ex-pat at that time in either case. We can always come back in the aftermath, and start the equivalent of Awdal Road Companies in the former US of A.

At least he's being honest. Vroman admits that the way his plan "works" is to destroy our current society, and hope to build something better in its ashes.

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We now move on to the technical objections. Recall that I had pointed out that, if the government truly couldn't figure out who was paid after a successful assassination, then those participating in the AP system couldn't, either. In particular, would-be assassins wouldn't be assured payment of the bounties posted online next to their target, and they wouldn't be able to track down the anonymous administrators if they got cheated.

Vroman responds to this by citing the success of online gambling. After all, users of such services can't be sure that the digital slot machines are "fair." But this misses the point: I agree that those placing bets on AP won't care who gets the money; so long as their target is taken out, these "customers" will be satisfied. The problem arises on the assassin's end. Before someone throws away life as he knows it by taking out a major politician, he will want to be assured of payment. The fact that previous contracts, worth perhaps thousands of dollars, were paid in full is irrelevant. The real problem will be, will the administrators pay out a multimillion or multibillion dollar jackpot?

I think there is truly no way around this problem. Again, it's not as if the would-be assassin can ask his buddies, "Hey, do you know anyone who killed a major political figure and didn't get paid?" The whole point of AP is its anonymity. A cheated killer is certainly not going to complain about his treatment; he will be on a plane to , in preparation for spending the rest of his life in secrecy.

Considerations such as these led me to say that AP will at best take out mid-level bureaucrats, and not the true heads of State. To this Vroman replies:

[I]f that were true, is it really such a crucial flaw? If AP bettors come to realize that the tiptop of the pyramid can find impenetrable missile silos to hide in, then it's no longer cost effective to chase them with ever higher donations....If the State is denuded of its agents and means of interaction, then it is just as harmless as if it had been chopped up directly.

Now here, Vroman has completely reversed himself. In his original article, he pooh-poohed the critics of AP who might be concerned about killing vast numbers of State underlings. Vroman assured us that it wouldn't be profitable to kill such lowly peons, and argued that the beauty of AP (in contrast to conventional revolutionary warfare) is that it takes the battle straight to the rulers. As it turns out, apparently, Vroman is not so confident after all in this prediction; maybe it will take the murder of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of State personnel before the head honchos give up. But that's okay, we can all move to another country and wait it out.

Vroman's failure to seriously consider the State's response to AP is evident when, after the above concession, he returns to his original vision of taking out the ringleaders. He claims that terrorist groups could mount a concerted attack to take out multiple targets, and receive billions in AP funds. But he has neglected the point I made in my original article, that in a possibly suicidal raid such as this, the State will surely know who is responsible for it; you can't take out an underground government bunker without some of your people dying, or without someone tipping off government investigators after the fact. In that case, the would then track down and punish anyone even remotely related to the attackers. AP does not provide much incentive on the margin to this type of military attack.

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We now move on to the objection that AP would "get out of hand." That is, if AP overcame all of the difficulties raised above, and managed to make government unworkable, then what's to prevent it from making private property similarly untenable? If AP allows disgruntled citizens to kill off enough politicians to eliminate the State, why wouldn't AP allow disgruntled union workers or competitors kill off enough businessmen to eliminate the market economy? Vroman assures us that this won't happen:

If the AP betting population suddenly gained an all-consuming desire to destroy capitalism, it would take a far greater monetary investment against businessmen than politicians, to reach that tipping point where targets are scared away from their positions.

Notice the rhetorical trick that Vroman has used, and how it contradicts his earlier arguments. Back when he explained that an-caps wouldn't be blamed for AP, Vroman pointed out that AP bettors will eliminate the State not because they are anarchists, but because any given politician will have a large group of enemies. But when we turn to the private sphere, all of a sudden Vroman feels that it would take "an all-consuming desire to destroy capitalism" before the market could be seriously hampered.

Let me say that I do agree with Vroman; I don't believe an AP system would spell the downfall of corporations, and Vroman's observations on this are cogent. But by the same token, I am more confident that AP would not spell the downfall of government. It's true, politicians will always have more enemies than private businessmen. But at the same time, political office offers far greater attractions and much greater security.

I next want to highlight Vroman's response to the problem of petty murders made possible by AP. I explained in my last article that currently, murder contracts taken out on ordinary people are rare because the assassin and employer would need to know each other, and the police could lean on obvious

suspects to give up the killer's name. Since this isn't true under AP, I see no reason that petty differences wouldn't lead to executions. I also pointed out that Jim Bell's response to the problem of extortion – that is, the problem of someone threatening a rich person with an AP contract unless he pays up – was silly.

In response, Vroman argued that the extortionist would have to communicate with his rich target, and that private detectives could thus discover his identity. I think this is yet another example of Vroman not taking his pet idea seriously enough. If encryption techniques allow an automated AP system to pay anonymous assassins without any chance of discovery, I don't see how private detectives will be able to track down a suitably clever extortionist. (His threats could be made on the Internet, for example, and he could specify an account for payment in the same way that AP players would get paid.)

Regarding the problem of petty murders, Vroman argues that the small list of suspects could be scrutinized closely, to see whose financial records had a "hole" the same size as the AP bounty. I find this less than reassuring. Personally, I have no idea what the current going rate is for murders of ordinary Joes; but I've seen a few "realistic" movies and I don't think it's more than a few grand. In the world of AP, where the hitman could conceivably be from a different city and has never even met his employer or victim, the price of a hit would presumably be much lower. So the only way private detectives could find telltale holes in a suspect's bank account is if AP turns out not to be very effective in facilitating hits. In other words, as in other contexts, Vroman thinks AP will be wonderful when it comes to killing bad guys, but impractical when it comes to killing people whom even he thinks deserve to live.

Before leaving this topic, let me highlight one of Vroman's thoughts, just to underscore my main contention that a functioning AP system would render the libertarian society impossible. Regarding the husband who takes out an AP contract on his wife, rather than divorcing her and losing half his assets, Vroman says, "Even if [the husband] expertly hid all his transactions with encryption and such, the sheer lack of other suspects may lead an arbitration committee to demand the husband prove his innocence" (bold added). Some of you may have thought Vroman was delivering a free society, in which, among other things, people accused of murder enjoyed a presumption of innocence. Think again.

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Vroman concludes his article by poking fun at my counterproposal of enlightening the masses. Regarding the downfall of the Soviet Empire – which didn't require a single assassination – Vroman dismisses it as a fraud. It is not surprising that Vroman sees no difference between Stalin-era gulags and bread lines, versus mobbed-up politicians and inflation; after all, at times Vroman seems to fulfill the anarchist strawman by saying his preferred plan would reduce every country to "equivalents of Somalia."

I still stand by my original claims. Since Vroman admits he has "neither the knowledge nor the will" to implement AP, I think the burden is on him to explain exactly how it would work, in a way that the government couldn't crush. I certainly concede that encryption and digital cash payments will facilitate traditional assassinations, but agree with Adam Young that such a strategy would only turn the public against us and create sympathy for the State.

We can't know for sure what would happen in a world of AP – since the technology for it is still science fiction – but I am inclined to think that government will persist, so long as the population clamors for it. And clamor the public surely will, in a world of rampant executions provided by the "free market."

Meet The 'Assassination Market' Creator Who's Crowdfunding Murder With Bitcoins

Andy Greenberg

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As Bitcoin becomes an increasingly popular form of digital cash, the cryptocurrency is being accepted in exchange for everything from socks to sushi to heroin. If one anarchist has his way, it'll soon be used to buy murder, too.

Last month I received an encrypted email from someone calling himself by the pseudonym Kuwabatake Sanjuro, who pointed me towards his recent creation: The website Assassination Market, a crowdfunding service that lets anyone anonymously contribute bitcoins towards a bounty on the head of any government official--a kind of Kickstarter for political assassinations. According to Assassination Market's rules, if someone on its hit list is killed--and yes, Sanjuro hopes that many targets will be--any hitman who can prove he or she was responsible receives the collected funds.

For now, the site's rewards are small but not insignificant. In the four months that Assassination Market has been online, six targets have been submitted by users, and bounties have been collected ranging from ten bitcoins for the murder of NSA director Keith Alexander and 40 bitcoins for the assassination of President Barack Obama to 124.14 bitcoins--the largest current bounty on the site--targeting Ben Bernanke, chairman of the Federal Reserve and public enemy number one for many of Bitcoin's anti-banking-system users. At Bitcoin's current rapidly rising exchanges rate, that's nearly \$75,000 for Bernanke's would-be killer.

Sanjuro's grisly ambitions go beyond raising the funds to bankroll a few political killings. He believes that if Assassination Market can persist and gain enough users, it will eventually enable the assassinations of enough politicians that no one would dare to hold office. He says he intends Assassination Market to destroy "all governments, everywhere."

"I believe it will change the world for the better," writes Sanjuro, who shares his handle with the nameless samurai protagonist in the Akira Kurosawa film "Yojimbo." (He tells me he chose it in homage to the creator of the online black market Silk Road, who called himself the Dread Pirate Roberts, as well Bitcoin inventor Satoshi Nakamoto.) "Thanks to this system, a world without wars, dragnet panopticon-style surveillance, nuclear weapons, armies, repression, money manipulation, and limits to trade is firmly within our grasp for but a few bitcoins per person. I also believe that as soon as a few politicians gets offed and they realize they've lost the war on privacy, the killings can stop and we can transition to a phase of peace, privacy and laissez-faire."

I contacted the Secret Service and the FBI to ask if they're investigating Assassination Market, and both declined to comment.

Like other so-called "dark web" sites, Assassination Market runs on the anonymity network Tor, which is designed to prevent anyone from identifying the site's users or Sanjuro himself. Sanjuro's decision to accept only Bitcoins is also intended to protect users, Sanjuro, and any potential assassins from being identified through their financial transactions. Bitcoins, after all, can be sent and received without necessarily tying them to any real-world identity. In the site's instructions to users, Sanjuro suggests they run their funds through a "laundry" service to make sure the coins are anonymized before contributing them to anyone's murder fund.

As for technically proving that an assassin is responsible for a target's death, Assassination Market asks its killers to create a text file with the date of the death ahead of time, and to use a cryptographic function known as a hash to convert it to a unique string of characters. Before the murder, the killer then embeds that data in a donation of one bitcoin or more to the victim's bounty. When a target is successfully murdered, he or she can send Sanjuro the text file, which Sanjuro hashes to check that the results match the data sent before the target's death. If the text file is legitimate and successfully predicted the date of the killing, the sender must have been responsible for the murder, according to Sanjuro's logic. Sanjuro says he'll keep one percent of the payout himself as a commission for his services.

Just reading about that coldly calculative system of lethal violence likely inspires queasy feelings or outrage. But Sanjuro says that the public's abhorrence won't prevent the system from working. And as a matter of ethics, he notes that he'll accept only user-suggested targets "who have initiated force against other humans. More specifically, only people who are outside the reach of the law because it has been subverted and corrupted, and whose victims have no other way to take revenge than to do so anonymously."

Even setting aside the immorality of killing, doesn't the notion of enabling small minorities of angry Bitcoin donors to assassinate elected officials sound like an attempt to cripple democracy? "Of course, limiting democracy is why we even have a constitution," Sanjuro responds. "Majority support does not make a leader legitimate any more than it made slavery legitimate. With this market the great equalising forces of capitalism have the opportunity to work in politics too. One bitcoin paid is one vote closer to a veto of whatever legislation you dislike."

Sanjuro didn't actually invent the concept of an anonymous crowdfunded assassination market. The idea dates back to the cypherpunk movement of the mid-1990s, whose adherents dreamt of using encryption tools to weaken the government and empower individuals. Former Intel engineer and Cypherpunk Mailing List founder Tim May argued that uncrackable secret messages and untraceable digital currency would lead to assassination markets in his "Cryptonanarchist's Manifesto" written in 1992.

A few years later, another former Intel engineer named Jim Bell proposed a system of funding assassinations through encrypted, anonymous donations in an essay he called "Assassination Politics." The system he described closely matches Sanjuro's scheme, though anonymity tools like Tor and Bitcoin were mostly theoretical at the time. As Bell wrote then:

If only 0.1% of the population, or one person in a thousand, was willing to pay \$1 to see some government slimeball dead, that would be, in effect, a \$250,000 bounty on his head. Further, imagine that anyone considering collecting that bounty could do so with the mathematical certainty that he could not be identified, and could collect the reward without meeting, or even talking to, anybody who could later identify him. Perfect anonymity, perfect secrecy, and perfect security. And that, combined with the ease and security with which these contributions could be collected, would make being an abusive government employee an extremely risky proposition. Chances are good that nobody above the level of county commissioner would even risk staying in office.

Bell would later serve years in prison for tax evasion and stalking a federal agent, and was only released in March of 2012. When I contacted him by email, he denied any involvement in Sanjuro's Assassination Market and declined to comment on it.

Sanjuro tells me he's long been aware of Bell's idea. But he only decided to enact it after the past summer's revelations of mass surveillance by the NSA exposed in a series of leaks by agency contractor Edward Snowden. "Being forced to alter my every happy memory during internet activity, every

intimate moment over the phone with my loved ones, to also include some of the people I hate the most listening in, analysing the conversation, was the inspiration I needed to embark on this task," he writes. "After about a week of muttering 'they must all die' under my breath every time I opened a newspaper or turned on the television, I decided something had to be done. This is my contribution to the cause."

Assassination Market isn't the first online service to suggest funding murder with bitcoins. Other Tor-hidden websites with names like Quick Kill, Contract Killer and C'thulhu have all claimed to offer murders in exchange for bitcoin payments. But none of them responded to my attempts to contact their administrators, and all required advanced payments for their services, so they may be scams.

And how do Assassination Market's users know that it's not a similar fraud scheme designed to steal users' bitcoins? "You don't," Sanjuro admits. But he argues that if it were a scam, it would be a very complex and risky one, given that even threatening to harm the president of the United States is a felony.

Other than that, "I can but appeal personally," Sanjuro writes. "I live a comfortable, albeit somewhat spartan life, and the only thing that really pains me is the increasing attacks on the liberties I enjoy in my daily life, mainly my personal privacy. I cannot buy that with money, so I have no need of it. There is nothing I want more than to see this project succeed, and for that I need dead politicians."

If the system does prove to work, the launch of Assassination Market may be ill-timed for Sanjuro, given law enforcement's recent crackdown on the dark web. In August, the FBI used an exploit in Tor to take down the web hosting firm Freedom Hosting and arrest its founder Eric Eoin Marques, who is accused of offering his services to child pornography sites. And just last month, the FBI also seized the popular Bitcoin- and Tor-based black market for drugs known as Silk Road and arrested its alleged creator, Ross Ulbricht.

Sanjuro counters that in addition to Tor, Bitcoin, and the usual encryption tools, he has "measures in place to prevent the effectiveness of such an arrest. Naturally these will have to be kept secret."

He adds that, like an earlier generation of cypherpunks, he puts his faith in the mathematical promise of cryptography to trump the government's power to stop him. "With cryptography, the state, or any protection firm, is largely obsolete...all activity that can be reduced to information transfer will be completely out of the government's, or anyone's, hands, other than the parties involved," he says.

"I am a crypto-anarchist," Sanjuro concludes. "We have a bright future ahead of us."